DOCTOR WHO NOVELLAS

WONDERLAND

MARK CHADBOURN

Mark Chadbourn

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Foreword by Graham Joyce

The first literary debate I ever engaged in was a playground discussion about a television programme that had set all the kids on fire. Five or six children stood in a circle, bug-eyed as they reported what theyd seen on Saturday afternoon.

It was an episode of Doctor Who, the first to have featured the Daleks. Black and white television which had a full Technicolor effect on the mind. It was all so new and so stunningly original, and it came with an eerie glow, some gas or ectoplasm that released itself from the cathode-ray tube every time the Doctor Who theme tune came on. Or maybe that was just the valves overheating. Yes, valves: I pity the later generations of kids denied the numinous pleasure of peering through the cardboard slats into the back of their TV set to see tiny bulb filaments lighting or dimming slowly like rows of eyes. Whatever it was, I could smell Doctor Who when it was on.

It was the smell of awe.

It was the beginning of the 1960s, and although science fiction wasnt invented in the 1960s, television-series science fiction pretty much was. Heres a premise to open up the synapses, kiddies: a man gets in a box that is bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. As well as being one of the incredible feats presented in Doctor Who, its also what television is. Get used to it, because it will become commonplace, a compulsion even. It worked like a drug.

Doctor Who was, along with the Beatles early music, an indication of what kind of decade we might be in for. And at that time our time-travelling Doctor was crossing the Atlantic as effortlessly as the Beatles.

If youd pitched up in the psychedelic playground that was Haight-Ashbury in the summer of 1967 you would have been equally at home conversing about Doctor Who as you would have been talking about John, Paul, George and Ringo. In Haight-Ashbury, a generation of young people were feeding their heads. There was this other box of inner space, larger on the inside than it seemed on the outside, and the door to this alternative TARDIS was opened by a chemical key.

A Doctor Who story set against a backdrop of free love and drug-taking is a potent cocktail. In the hands of a lesser writer it might not

have worked. But told by master storyteller Mark Chadbourn it is explosive. While to some it may appear controversial to mix the two things, to me it seems perfectly logical. The Doctor would have moved through Haight-Ashbury quite enjoying the air of experiment and head-tripping, floating slightly above the frantic hedonism of the times, perhaps delighted that for once in his long, long life, his eccentric garb didnt seem at all out of place.

Wonderland brilliantly conjures up the mood and time of the place. I dont know if Mark Chadbourn was ever there, but he writes so well he makes it seem as though he must have been. The story perfectly captures the mood of the times: of the re-casting and re-making of rules; of the prospect that anything might happen; and of the sense of disillusion and danger lurking underneath the naive optimism and behind the clouds of incense. After all, some pretty nasty people were growing their hair long, too.

But with Chadbourn at the helm you know you are in a safe pair of hands. His expertise in storytelling is immediately apparent in the way he skilfully marshals an incredible amount of technical and geographical information without the reader being distracted for a moment. Its an enviable skill, and perhaps one honed through his several years of experience as a journalist before he became a successful novelist.

Add that to his deftness in building an ominous sense of dread, delivered in precise increments, and the blend of fear and danger is perfectly pitched for the Doctor Who aficionado.

The characterisation of the Doctor is superb. He moves through the mystery and danger of Haight-Ashbury with the distracted air of a professor puzzled by a mathematical formula. But all the time he is fully aware of the menace, the very real threat to himself and his companions. Sometimes the Doctor appears to hover above events, only touched at a tangent, like Tom Bombadil in The Lord of The Rings. His superiority is evident, but unlike Tolkiens creation, the Doctors humanity restores his vulnerability and he is every bit as involved in the mystery as its intriguing narrator.

The key to Mark Chadbourns writing is his understanding of mystery. He knows how the unknown grips us and he knows why. He takes a craftsmans pleasure in carefully assembling the elements, but more than that he understands what lies behind all mysteries, the quest for solution, and perhaps this is why the spirit of Doctor Who sits perfectly in HaightAshburys social experiment a quest in its own

right.

Wonderland is Doctor Who on acid, and perhaps my only regret and I dont think my revealing this in the introduction is a spoiler is that the Doctor doesnt get to take the drug himself. But then again the Doctor probably doesnt need to. Hes a trip-and-a-half all on his own. Hes already there.

Mark Chadbourns Wonderland will take you there also. A world of love and drugs and danger and horror. So settle back, expand your mind, and prepare to be entertained.

Graham Joyce October 2002

Sometimes I dream of San Francisco. The pearly mist rolling up from the bay in a glistening wall, the streets as still and quiet as childhood. Those days will be with me forever, haunting my waking hours, troubling my sleep. Time doesnt dull the memory. Time is meaningless. I lived it then, and I live it now, always. And on every occasion I wake up crying…

The first time I saw the Doctor, sunlight limned him like an angel come down to earth. He strode out of the throng surging through Haight-Ashbury, all the questors and no-hopers, the dreamers and the trippers and the lost, and he walked into my life and changed everything. At the time he didnt look out of place at all. Only now can I see how unique he was.

It was January 1967. The Summer of Love was just around the corner, and across America battle-lines were already being drawn. Tension was in the air, hard beneath the smoky aroma of grass that brought dreams of hope and peace and love.

For a girl from the conservative suburbs of Dallas, San Francisco at that time was like another dimension, filled with alien beings, where every sight and sound and smell was beyond real. And Haight-Ashbury was the capital city of this weird world, six blocks of pure strangeness straddling the Golden Gate Park Panhandle. White Rabbits and Mad Hatters, all down there, in Wonderland. I loved it.

Even with hindsight its hard to comprehend the madness that was Haight-Ashbury. For that brief period it seemed like every oddball in America was either living there or on their way. In 1965 it had just 15,000 residents. By the summer of 1967, that figure had surged to

100,000, all crammed on top of each other, all searching for something. Barely a day went by without some protest rally or a local band playing a free concert in the Panhandle. And those local bands Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, Janis Joplin, Santana, the Quicksilver Messenger Service… Music never moved me again like it did at that time, in that place.

There, innocence was important. The true enemy was cynicism, the one thing that held us back and kept all the repressive forces in power. Everyone did all they could to fight that, and for a while it looked like we were going to win.

The Diggers championed a socialist utopia, handing out free meals to hundreds in Golden Gate Park; and when they werent doing that they were urging local businesses to distribute their profits to the community. Timothy Leary pushed us all to expand our minds with LSD. Ken Kesey challenged authority at every turn with his Merry Pranksters. We had our own cafes, boutiques, newspaper, dancehalls, medical clinic, our own world, run by us, for us.

Back home I was Jess Jessica to my parents Willamy, twenty-two years of age with nothing to mark the passing of years apart from a dream of something better. There I was Summer, a new name to mark my reinvention as a poet who could capture those transcendental energies as they transformed the world into a more wonderful place.

It sounds so pretentious now: a poet. But that was how we were back then, when we still had belief, before it was all grubbed out of us by the mean spirits and black hearts, the businessmen and the politicians and the generals.

On the road, Denny and I heard of what was happening in San Francisco with the hippies though that name didnt really catch on until a month or so later. Like everyone else in America, we were slowly waking up to the fact that a new age was dawning, but unlike most of our parents generation, we didnt feel threatened.

Finally there were people like us, people who had dreams of that better world. There was no doubt in our minds: San Francisco was the place to be, with all that power rising up, ready to rush out across the country, across the world. We wanted to be a part of that; we had to be involved it was a calling.

Denny didnt need any convincing, though at first glance he wasnt really like all the others who were being drawn to the West Coast. He

was a jock, dropped out of college, bummed around for a while until I hooked up with him, but I knew from the moment we met that his heart was in the right place. Denny Glass, boy wonder, the only hippie to have a crew cut.

Id been searching for a while, on the road since my folks split up. None of us ever got over what we saw that November afternoon in Dealey Plaza. But with Denny, everything felt right. When I gently suggested San Francisco, he came alive.

Denny, a dream, with blue eyes and brown hair. Two hearts, he used to whisper.

Together, forever.

And I wake up crying …

Excuse me. Im looking for this guy. I thrust Dennys picture under another nose.

It must have been the hundredth that morning and the snap was starting to look dog-eared and stained, but I tried to keep a smile on my face.

Oh, Im sorry my dear, but I dont think we can help you. This man returned my smile in a distracted way. I could see a gentleness behind his eyes, but he had barely glanced at the picture. He sounded English, and he was a real eccentric in his tall, stove-pipe hat, voluminous black frock coat, white shirt and tiny, spotted bow-tie. Anywhere else he would have looked more than a little weird, but in the Haight he fitted in perfectly.

His names Denny Glass, I persisted. Hes my boyfriend. He came down here a few weeks ago to find us a place to crash. He was supposed to wire me once he found somewhere, but… The words trailed away; I didnt want to think about all the possibilities hanging in that emptiness.

Here, let me have a look. This guy was a Brit too, kind of good looking and about my age, but his hair and his clothes were L7-square. He seemed friendly enough, though. No, sorry. But then, weve only just arrived here, havent we, Doctor?

I looked back to the man, but he didnt answer, and appeared to have lost interest in the conversation altogether. My irritation must have shown in my expression.

Oh, dont mind the Doctor. Hes a sweetie really. He just gets a bit … distracted sometimes. The girl who was with them was hip, with a minidress and long blonde hair. She was pretty. Another Brit; tourists, I guessed.

The Doctor looked faintly embarrassed, while Ben gave a derisive snort. Yeah, thats right, a real sweetie. He handed the picture back to me. Sorry, love. I hope you find your boyfriend.

I shrugged; situation normal. As the three strangers moved off into the flow, I held out Dennys photo for the next passer-by, a boy in a Big Brother and the Holding Company T-shirt. He was clutching something bundled in a torn, oil-stained denim jacket. There wasnt anything particularly out of the ordinary about him early twenties, long hair, trimmed beard, glassy eyes like he was tripping but I had the strangest feeling. He walked right past me and stopped.

The Doctor and his two companions were about twenty feet away. I dont know if there was some psychic connection, but the Doctor stopped too. When he turned, he had this dark, concerned expression.

Can I help you? he asked.

The boys glassy eyes were fixed hard on the Doctor. He spasmed, and then his left arm shook like he was sick. There was something in the air that gave me gooseflesh.

He opened his mouth to speak, then closed it again, before slowly unwrapping the bundle. For some reason I couldnt explain, I really didnt want to see what he was carrying. I should have walked away; it probably would have been better for me on every front if I had. But I couldnt; I just stood there and watched as he peeled that jacket off in a creepy, slow-stoned way.

It felt so dreamy and hypnotic it was like I was high myself. I couldnt hear any sound from the crowd, the street vendors hawking their comix and the Oracle, the kid playing guitar in the gutter; everything was dead, like we were in a bubble. The jacket arm came away. Silver flashed in the sun. The other arm fell away. What was I seeing? More silver, a metallic headpiece, black holes, like eyes, piercing a grey cloth-like face.

The Doctors face was grim. His companions looked horrified. All three of them like statues, uneasy.

The jacket hit the sidewalk. Slowly the boy held up his burden: a

head, hideous, silver, cold. It was like some robot from the Twilight Zone, but this one made me scared.

A Cyberman. The Doctors voice burst the bubble of silence and the world rushed in.

The Doctor and his friends moved forward slowly, but I couldnt take my eyes off that mechanical thing. The boy raised it until it was shoulder-height and then it just burst apart. It wasnt like it exploded no shards of metal, no sound but like it broke up, became light, or oil, or something, and disappeared on the breeze.

The Doctor was transfixed, but his companions rushed forward, and I ran up to the boy too, not believing what I saw yet knowing I had seen it. What did you do? I shouted at him.

He stared at me with heavy eyes, looked right through me, and then he blinked once lazily and it was as if he was waking from a dream. I saw awareness, then incomprehension, and then fear.

He looked slowly around our faces and then said, Ive seen the Devil. Hes come for us all.

An instant later he was rushing wildly away along Haight, leaving the rest of us staring at each other like wed all gone crazy.

The Doctor scurried into the Panhandle so fast that the other two had trouble keeping up with him. I dont know why I followed maybe I was bored after spending all that day getting nowhere but I like to think that I sensed something special, poetic; one of those moments when life spins off its axis, taking you to another future.

They were heading towards something I hadnt seen before, even though Id been through that part of the park five or more times getting soup and rice from the Diggers. In the middle of a thick cluster of trees just off one of the paths was a blue box, about the size and shape of a phone booth, with tiny windows and a sign at the top saying Police Box. The Doctor was about to open a door in the side when the young guy noticed me watching. He nudged the girl and said, Hang on, weve got company.

The Doctor stopped and looked at me, his eyes almost frightening now, lost in shadow beneath his thick brows.

Sorry, love, the young guy called to me. You cant come in here.

Whats in there? I said. And then: What happened … what was that? I was starting to panic. After all my fears about Denny, being in such a strange, strange place with no real home and hardly any food, I felt like crying.

The Doctor must have seen this in my face because he said quietly, to his friends, Look, why dont you two go with this young lady and help her look for her friend.

Ill just do a bit of poking about into this other business by myself for a while, and we can all meet up back here again later this evening.

The younger guy immediately looked anxious and suspicious. Hey, hang on a mo. You wouldnt just be trying to get shot of us for a while, would you? I mean, the Cybermen

Are not a problem to be approached in a headlong rush. I need time to think about this. Without further ado, the Doctor slipped through the door into the tiny box, pausing briefly to cast me a strange glance. I couldnt read it at all. There was a hint of a smile, but I couldnt tell if it was supportive or mocking. In the brief time Id known him, hed made me feel strange, like he wasnt one of us at all.

The couple introduced themselves as Ben and Polly. Ben offered to buy me a coffee with a few dollars he said hed found buried away in the depths of the Doctors police box. They both shared a secret joke about this, but I was too freaked out to try to make any sense of it.

The truth is, what Id seen that afternoon paled into insignificance beside my feelings for Denny. Id tried not to think about it too much good, old, optimistic Summer but deep down I had this sick feeling that something bad had happened. There was no reason why Denny wouldnt have wired me to come and join him. All he had to do was find a place for us it didnt have to be anywhere special. But since he arrived in San Francisco I hadnt heard a word from him.

The setting sun made the place even stranger. As the shadows crept across the road and the buildings took on a reddish tinge, the night people came out, distorted into twisted insects in the half-light.

He said hed seen the Devil. I was haunted by the look of fear on the boys face as his senses came back to him.

Something scared him. Polly stared into the growing dark, then caught

herself and made an effort to raise my spirits with a bright smile. I liked her. She reminded me of how I used to be before all the troubles and the tears.

That thing he was carrying that robot head. Youd seen it before. Ben and Polly exchanged a glance. Look, dont try to keep things from me, just because you think I cant deal with it. After all Ive seen, I can deal with anything.

Ben wasnt convinced, but Polly trusted me enough to spill. She was faltering to start with, not sure if she was going to blow my mind, always checking my face for reactions. She talked about other worlds, other times. How could I not believe her?

It sounded so crazy and wild, but wonderful too, just what we all believed there in the Haight theres more than what we see around us. But it was scary as well. The Cybermen sounded so cold and emotionless, so utterly ruthless. If they were in San Francisco, what did that mean for all of us?

We reached the I-Thou coffee shop just as darkness fell. Light blazed through the windows on to the sidewalk, and as the door jangled open and shut the aroma of fresh grounds and patchouli drifted out into the night. Clouds of steam burst at regular intervals behind the counter as if from a fabulous Victorian machine.

You could always count on seeing life at the I-Thou. Some beat poet dreaming he was Allen Ginsberg gave an impromptu reading in one corner: black turtleneck, black jeans, black sunglasses, black attitude. A chick swayed to music no one else could hear, smiling dreamily, and every now and then shed break into wild gyrations, all hips and lashing hair.

All the tables were full. Beards, long hair, tie-dye, camouflage, denim, beads, bangles, smoke, voices filled with passion, hope, politics, freedom. It was a blast, the Haight in essence, everything that I valued. The Magic Mouse hailed me quietly from the other side of the cafe, his face as doleful as ever, the familiar pile of unsold polemical magazines on the table in front of him. Idaho George sat with a bowl of rice, the fork moving back and forth from his mouth so slowly he must have been on geological time.

I cant do this, man, he muttered as I passed. Ive been eating this for three days now and it never gets any less.

Once wed found a free table and Ben had got the coffee, I began to

feel safe and relaxed among my own.

Where are you living? Polly asked, concerned.

A squat, over on Oak. You can see the Panhandle from my window. Its easy to find a piece of floor to put your head. Round here, everybody helps everybody else. I sipped the coffee, enjoying the warmth on my hands. The night had brought a chill to the air. Thats why I got so worried about Denny. Its like he just disappeared.

Polly asked for Dennys picture again and examined it closely. He looks lovely.

He is. Were soul-mates.

I dont know how to put this, Ben began hesitantly, but you know how blokes are

My smile silenced him; it said more than words. Let me tell you about Denny. When my folks split up, I hit the road. The way I saw it, if you want to be a poet you have to get experience … of people … all the world has to offer. Besides, there wasnt anything for me back at home. Things hadnt been right for a while. It felt like my parents were dying a little every day. I tried to sound detached, grown-up, but the memories were still raw. When youve had a happy childhood, idyllic even, and then everything falls apart, its like nearly getting hit by a bus. You stand in the middle of the road, thinking what happened?, and spend the rest of your life looking over your shoulder.

I met Denny in a small town near Amarillo. A bunch of the local rednecks came out of a bar one night and set on this long-haired kid trying to bum small change outside.

He hadnt done anything wrong; they just picked on him because he was different. And you could tell from the way the rednecks were acting, they wouldnt stop until he was all messed up. I was on the other side of the road, on my way to the bus station. I dropped my bag, ran over, and started trying to pull those drunks off. One turned and hit me in the face hard I had a black eye for days. I thought theyd stop when they saw I was a girl. Only they didnt see a girl … just another hippie.

All I remember was feeling like someone had set off a bomb in my head. My nose and lip were bleeding … And then Denny was there.

Hes a big guy, a football player. He took two of them straight out, and then managed to get me and the other guy away before the rednecks could come back at us. I took the picture back from Polly and traced around the outline of his smiling face, trying to remember what it was like to touch his skin. Those guys were savages. Denny could have been killed. He knew that, but he didnt think twice about it.

The beat poet finished his background drone and somebody I couldnt see started playing the bongos. It sounded like a heartbeat, growing faster.

Denny and I got out of that place on the same bus. We talked right through the night … about music, and books and politics and life. And about President Kennedy, and what his death meant to both of us … what it meant to the country. But youre English … you wouldnt know about that. What Im trying to say is, Denny and I, were the same. Two hearts … forever. I know him inside out, and he knows me. I couldnt stop my eyes filling with tears. It would have been easy for him to find somewhere for us here. And he would have contacted me the moment he did. And I havent heard a thing.

The bongo player became more frenetic. Ben looked into the depths of his coffee.

Sorry, you know, for suggesting … His voice trailed away.

Thats okay. I dont blame you for doubting. Im going to find him.

The bongo players wild drumming ended suddenly. The whole room fell silent for the briefest instant, until some woman screamed and then everyone rushed towards the windows, talking at once. Ben was the first to get through the crowd, but Polly and I were close behind. The woman who screamed was pointing through the window into the night: all we

could see was mist.

The Magic Mouse. Her voice was like broken glass.

Ben was at her side. What happened?

She turned to look at the table where Id seen the Mouse before. He was sitting there … just looking around. And then he started to fade away.

Somebody laughed. The woman shook her head furiously. Its true! I

could see right through his face … see that picture on the wall there! She was shaking. Ben helped her to a seat in an old-fashioned, gentlemanly way. The woman covered her face and spoke through her hands. I thought it was a flashback. But it was real. It wasnt like he was glass … more like he was made of light. I think I saw colours …

beautiful colours … She drifted for a few seconds, then jumped up and looked back outside fearfully. He freaked out. The Mouse freaking out! It never happens! And he ran outside, over there, and … She snapped her fingers. Poof! Gone …

vanished. Just like that.

Everywhere went quiet again. What she had said sounded ludicrous, but no one was laughing now. Blue Moonbeams. It was a guy next to me in a camouflage jacket with a peace symbol drawn on the back. What? I said.

He looked at me anxiously, then decided I was okay. Blue Moonbeams. Its a batch of bad acid thats all over the place. The tabs got a blue crescent moon on it.

She doesnt look like shes tripping.

Not her. He grew uncomfortable. Ive not seen it, but everybodys talking about it. Jack Stimson from the Oracle was down here researching a story about it. A lot of kids dropped Blue Moonbeams and disappeared. So they say.

Disappeared like she said? Like, for real?

It was a question too far in the paranoid Haight. The guy pushed his way through the crowd like I was a cop.

Blimey, this is a weird place. Ben hadnt heard my conversation.

Oh, Ben, youre such a square. Its just very colourful. Polly wasnt fazed by what had happened; I dont know if she even believed it. She turned to me and said, Shall we start asking around about Denny?

She was surprised when I shook my head, but an uneasy feeling was growing on me. I want to go to the Oracle.

The optimism of those bright times has faded, along with my youth. Now Im older and lonelier, and locked away in this big, old house perched on the edge of nowhere, the world looks colder and harsher.

The events of that bleak January made me a different person scared, introspective, cynical and, most of all, sad. I lost so much so quickly, snatched away from me at a time when we were all on the cusp of a bright future. Even after so many years have trundled by, it still doesnt seem fair.

Death and darkness and terror, the antithesis of what Haight-Ashbury had to offer.

From my window, the New England countryside rolls away into the lowering night. There are a few lights dotted here and there, amid the sea of darkness. The worst thing about being a poet (failed) is that you know a metaphor when you see one. Ive put as many miles as I can between San Francisco and me without actually leaving the country, and it still doesnt feel like its far enough. Maybe I should go to England, like I always planned. Maybe I should just keep running.

Here in the house theres no escape. There are ghosts everywhere, dreams I had, people I knew; one in particular.

Sometimes I think back and wonder if it all would have turned out differently if I hadnt been there in Dealey Plaza on that warm afternoon in November. I can still remember the smell of hotdogs and asphalt, petrol fumes rising above the crowds lining the road. A girl, excited, playful, running with her father; he was clutching on to his hat to prevent it blowing away. And the colours: red dresses, blue sky, green, green grass. Its funny how the colours of your childhood always seem so much more vivid than anything you ever experience later in life.

I remember standing next to my mother, smelling her perfume; my dad shielding his eyes against the glare, saying, Here he comes! In that one moment, everything crystallised: the happiness of my childhood, the comfort of being part of a loving family, of being in the right place, of seeing a future that reached to the horizon.

I think, perhaps, that was the last happy time. Though I couldnt see it while I was walking it, from then on, it was a long, declining road to the place I am now.

I was murdered at the same time as the President, though thats probably that stupid poetic side of me. Certainly, something bigger than the man died that day. I remember Jackie scrambling to the back of the car to recover a piece of blood and brain-stained skull. Sickening, but somehow so very sad, capturing in one image the sheer

futility of that moment.

Poor Jackie.

Poor me.

The Oracle office was at the exact corner of Haight and Ashbury, the symbolic heart of that place. And beneath it was the symbolic head The Psychedelic Shop that had opened the previous year. Everyone just called it The Head Shop. Ron and Jay Thelin, the owners, were the high priests of the new religion of LSD. To them, acid provided a profound, mystical experience and they wanted a place that would offer anything required by other seekers of mind expansion. The Head Shop had information, certainly, but also whatever you needed to smoke your drug of choice, and bells, and posters, and comix and books, and anything else necessary for the journey to someplace else. The Thelins also funded the Oracle, two visionaries with their hearts in the right place.

I was surprised to see the Doctor inside, curiously examining various bongs and pipes as if they were alien artefacts. He was wearing a long black cloak against the cold and as he moved around the displays it billowed behind him in a manner that clearly transfixed a girl tripping near the door.

Ben almost knocked her over when he rushed in anxiously. Doctor! Did you find anything?

Do you know, the Doctor said, tapping an ornately carved bong, that hallucinogenic drugs have been used by cultures as diverse as Neolithic man, the ancient Egyptians, the Aztecs and the Sumerians to engender a religious experience? Drugs as sacrament.

Wow! the girl by the door said dreamily, staring at the Doctor in admiration. The High Priest of Trips!

Doctor, why are you here? Polly asked.

Oh, just browsing, he said vaguely, replacing the bong. And I wanted to have a little chat with the owners. Doctor, the Cybermen, Ben pressed. Oh, I dont think theyd have much use for a place like this, the Doctor said. Ben could barely contain his exasperation. I meant, he said through gritted teeth, have you got anywhere yet with your poking around? Well, not really. But remember, Ben: things arent

always what they seem.

Ben would clearly have pressed him further, but Polly interjected: Theres something very strange going on here, Doctor. We were just in a cafe where somebody disappeared right in front of everybody.

Really? The Doctor gave a faintly absent-minded smile. Did you see it?

Well, no, but

The Doctor waved a finger to silence her, and then used it to indicate his eyes.

Theres nothing like the evidence of ones own eyes, Polly.

Oh, right, Ben exclaimed, drily. So youre saying that everythings hunky-dory here, are you? He glanced worriedly out into the mist drifting up against the windows.

I could see the Doctor choosing his words carefully. I wouldnt say that, exactly.

But we shouldnt take things at face value. I think that Cyberman head was a sort of message. A warning, perhaps. Intended for me.

Polly was clearly very unnerved by this idea. So that means that someone knows who you are. And that youre here.

Her words made me uneasy. Who was he? Why was he here?

The girl hugged her arms around her as she followed Bens gaze out into the night.

There is something out there. Cant you feel it? Its in the air… that feeling of threat…

Come now. The Doctor fixed his smile on me, but those eyes still made me unsettled.

Lets not upset our young friend. Im sorry, my dear, I didnt catch your name.

Summer, I replied.

He took my hand with surprising gentleness. What a lovely name. Im very pleased to meet you. Now, how is your search going?

I told him that I wanted to visit the Oracle to find more information about the Blue Moonbeams LSD. It was probably irrelevant. Denny had never tried LSD, and I didnt think he ever would, but I had to investigate everything.

Are you coming, Doctor? Polly asked.

Oh, I dont think you need me there. Besides, I want to have a closer look at those. He pointed to some psychedelic posters on one wall. Before any of us could say anything further, he had flicked his cloak around him and walked away, as if we were already forgotten. Is he always so helpful? I asked, with unaccustomed sarcasm. I was probably being pathetic, but I was a little hurt that hed wanted to browse in a shop, rather than help me look for Denny.

Oh, hes got his reasons, Im sure, Ben said uncomfortably.

Its not that he doesnt care. Polly put an arm around my shoulders and gave me a squeeze.

Im sure hes very busy, I replied.

The Oracle office was up some side stairs. It was a mess: paper everywhere, radical posters peeling off the walls, typewriters that looked fifty years old perched on rickety desks. The atmosphere was smoky but electric with the kind of optimism that hung all over the Haight.

Even at that time of the evening there was still activity. One journalist hammered out his story with two fingers, while three more were engaged in intense phone conversations. Two others kicked back listening to music on headphones.

They were clearly used to people wandering in off the sidewalk because no one batted an eyelid when we entered. A heavily bearded man with a massive gut broke off from the ear-splitting pounding of the Stones 19th Nervous Breakdown to point us in the direction of Jack Stimson.

The journalist was a tall, painfully thin man, barely filling his double-breasted suit. His pale skin looked even greyer in contrast with the brilliance of his red and green flowered shirt. He affected elegance by smoking with a long cigarette holder.

He hung up the phone as we approached and gave an expansive gesture. Greetings, cat and chicklets. Step into my office. He opened

an imaginary door.

Youre Jack Stimson? I ventured.

The one and only. Currently awash in the preparations for the biggest story of the year. Make that the decade. Heck, maybe even the biggest story ever! He looked around at the blank faces before prompting, The Human Be-In, cool kids.

Whats that? Ben said, confused and feeling increasingly out of his depth.

Whereve you been, man? Stimson genuinely looked as if he believed Ben had wandered in from another planet. The Gathering of the Tribes. A hip pow-wow to usher in the Age of Aquarius. The seasons are turning, man. Historys going our way. And it all starts here.

You know, mate, Ive got no idea what youre talking about, Ben said, ruffled.

Its a festival, Ben. I picked up one of the flyers from Stimsons desk to show him. All these bands are playing in Golden Gate Park later this month … Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, Quicksilver Messenger Service. Timothy Learys going to be speaking, and Allen Ginsberg and some of the other Beats.

Its going to bring the mellow and the activists together, Stimson said evangelically. Itll ignite a fire of love thatll spread out across America …

across the whole world. A Summer of Love. Theyll have to listen to us after this, man. No more war in Vietnam. No more suits and ties running the show. No more greedheads. They might have the power, but weve got the numbers.

Oh, I get it. A pop concert, Ben said dismissively.

Stimson shook his head wearily.

I wanted to talk about the Blue Moonbeams, I said.

Stimson started at this, his exuberant mood fading quickly. What do you know about that?

I told him what had happened in the I-Thou. My boyfriends missing. I dont know if its connected

You better hope its not, he said sharply, before rifling among the mess of paper on his desk for a coffee-stained notebook. I first heard about it from one of the Diggers in the Fall. Word had been getting out about some bad acid … only this took you so far-out you never came back again literally, dig? This was crazy stuff. Kids would drop a tab. Not long after theyd fade away, like, vanish, gone, man. This is a strange cosmos, kids. Weve got supermen from the stars coming here in times past to be our gods and Atlantis calling out and witches casting spells up on Divisadero, but this, you. know, man … here in the Haight? He shook his head again.

Crazy, I said.

Right. Crazy. Except I heard it again at the Love Pageant Rally. Just before everyone in the crowd dropped acid together, this guy flipped, started running around screaming not to drop the Blue Moonbeams. Then they were talking about it at the Fillmore, and the Avalon Ballroom … all over. Kids vanishing.

Do you think it could possibly be true? Polly asked.

Stimson flicked over a few pages of his notebook. Heres the facts, maam. Kids have been going missing. Ive got names and addresses, hard facts. All over the Haight.

But you know what its like here. There are chickenhawks down at the bus station picking up the pretty little things rolling in wide-eyed from the sticks. People come and go and come. Running away from something, running towards something. And the Haights attracted some real bad dudes recently, man. Its always the same when something gets a buzz. All the creeps come out of the woodwork trying to get their share.

Youre saying its not real? Ben pressed.

Im saying the smart money is on a big batch of contaminated acid dumped on the Haight for quick, hard cash, and the bad guys are already a long way away. And its so bad, kids are burning out. Or killing themselves. Its not hard to disappear here. He chewed on his cigarette holder for a moment, before adding, But Im not ruling anything out.

I tried to keep my fears hard in me, but I could see from Pollys expression I hadnt done a very good job. I took out Dennys picture and slid it across the desk. This is my boyfriend, Denny Glass. Hes missing. I dont think he would have taken acid.

Hes … I struggled for the words.

A straight edge? Stimson said, examining the photo. I cant publish it. If I did, Id have kids queuing round the block trying to find their missing beau. He saw my face fall, and added, But Ill tell you what I will do. Im out on the street all the time its my second home, man. Ill ask around. Denny Glass will be found. You have my word, sister.

At the time that sounded like a good thing.

After Id given Stimson the address of my crashpad, we went back outside and found the Doctor standing under a street lamp watching the mist drift in strange patterns.

It was surprisingly quiet out, with few of the Haights usual freaks milling around.

The Doctor was distracted, and at first his expression was troubled, but when he saw us approaching he manufactured a supercilious smile.

How was your little chat? he asked.

Im not getting any closer to Denny, I said. I dont know what to do next.

Oh, I shouldnt worry, he said. Im sure hell turn up.

Looking back, Im sure he intended his words to be reassuring, but at the time I found them patronising and heartless. They knocked the blues off me, and I snapped back, Im going to carry on looking, and Im going to find him. I know it. Its only a matter of time.

The Doctor obviously didnt believe me. Yes, yes, my dear, he said, in a comforting tone. Im sure you will. That irritated me even more. Who the hell are you, anyway? I said.

The Doctor looked flustered and uncomfortable, but said nothing.

Hes a … traveller, Polly interjected quickly.

You can say that again, Ben added.

I looked around them all and thought they were probably crazier than anybody else in the Haight.

We were interrupted by the sound of someone approaching through

the mist. I felt instantly on edge, threatened. Maybe it was a premonition; it certainly wasnt imagination because I could see it on everyones face.

Polly clutched her belly queasily. What is that, Doctor?

Whatever he was feeling, it had put him on guard. Im not sure, Polly … Something to which you humans obviously have an inherent reaction!

I noted that he said you and not we, but I was too disturbed by whatever was approaching to give it any further thought. The footsteps were deadened and distorted beneath the thickening mist; the anxiety buzz rose like white noise at the back of my head. Unconsciously, Ben formed fists.

The mist churned unnaturally as if something were pushing it away and a dark shape appeared within it. Whatever we expected, it wasnt a bearded freak in Jesus sandals, a stained vest and half-mast bell bottoms. Then we saw that something was wrong with him. He had an awkward way of walking, as though hed once had a serious injury, and his eyes were wide and glassy. Tripping, I thought, but there was something weird about his expression that couldnt be explained by acid.

As he got closer, the cast of his face became frightening; it was almost like he was wearing a mask. Ben stepped in front of Polly. The Doctor didnt move, silently analysing the stranger.

The freak stopped a few feet away, his head held to one side as he looked at us with a creepy blank curiosity. Ben was itching to move, but the Doctor held him back with one hand on his chest.

After a moment, the stranger raised one hand and said, Behold, the chrysalis. Walk not through lower city heart. Pain. There are shadows. In colour waits the dream. It made no sense, and the freaks expression grew strained, as if he realised this. He half turned, and gestured behind him.

Someone else lay hidden in the mist. It was larger, oddly shaped, certainly not a man; I had no idea what it was, but my heart began to pound as it came forward.

At the same time, the freak moved backwards, head still to one side, unblinking eyes fixed firmly on us, until the mist folded round him again like a theatre curtain, and he was gone.

Doctor, what is it? Pollys voice was like dry leaves. I was scared. Whatever was coming looked like some monster as the mist revealed, then hid, a sick peep show. I caught glimpses of something vaguely human, but then something that looked like giant wings, something else that looked like antenna.

The Doctor was rigid, his attention fixed. Oh my giddy aunt! he exclaimed.

Finally, the creature brought itself into the arc of the street lamp, and my breath caught in my throat. Wow, I muttered. A butterfly-man.

And it was: a man turning into a butterfly, or a butterfly becoming a man, or some hybrid of the two. It was like some wild trip, a glorious dream that could easily turn bad.

Polly gripped the Doctors sleeve. What is it? she asked again.

Eerie silence hung over the scene, the mundane sounds of the city swallowed by the mist. The butterfly-man appeared to be floating, weightless. It paused in front of us, its multi-faceted eyes like lamps. It made a gesture, heavy with meaning but impossible to understand, reaching from its waist up above its head. The delicate, vividly coloured wings fluttered almost imperceptibly.

Its trying to communicate with us, Polly said.

The words had barely left her lips when the butterfly-man started to go back into the mist just like the freak had done, in an unnerving backwards motion while it kept its gaze fixed on us.

Shall I go after it, Doctor? Ben didnt sound like he relished the prospect.

No. Stay here. The Doctor watched until the thing had gone, taking that unnerving feeling with it. The distant sounds of the city crept back in.

You know what that was? I said.

I do indeed. The Doctors expression was graven. A Menoptra. One of a race that exists on a planet far, far away from here.

He appeared deathly serious. What did it want? Is it dangerous?

The Doctor folded his hands together in deep thought, and for a

second I thought that he wasnt going to answer. It is a bit of a mystery, isnt it? he said eventually, his tone surprisingly light. The Menoptra shouldnt be here, any more than the Cybermen should . And you saw the way it moved its arm? I nodded. Its almost as if theres something … ritualistic about this business.

We should get out of here, Doctor, Ben said morosely. This whole place is crazy.

Its turning my head around.

The Doctor, suddenly intensely serious, disagreed. No, Ben. We cannot leave. Theres something out there. An intelligence. And it has noticed us.

You can never escape the past. It remains trapped in that time machine of our heads, endlessly replaying, hinting at other dimensions of what might have been and what never was. Jackie scrambling over the back of the car, reaching out in one moment of insane clarity. Denny hauling me away from the rednecks, both of us terrified but laughing, fear and hope in equal measure. Most potent of all, that year of 1967, when everything changed, forever. A time of beauty and decadence, haunting and so very sad.

The past has its own terrible gravity. You go through your life blithely looking ahead until one day you wake up and realise what has gone before has attained some critical mass. Suddenly there is no escape; it keeps dragging you back to a particular time, warping your life with a secret pull, twisting your psyche until nothing inside you or ahead of you is unaffected by what has gone before. We become ruined, dead satellites of a monstrous force.

When I look back on the Haight with these eyes of a different person, the Doctor looms large. He presented a face we could all understand, but behind it I could sense a universe of meaning and information that stretched off to infinity. Like space, he was alien, timeless. There were no human parameters by which I could judge him. Could he be trusted? Did he feel love or hate or anger? At times I felt he had an agenda so far removed from our own that it was impossible to comprehend.

The Doctor wanted to get back to his police box to think over what hed seen. For me, all the craziness that Id been drawn into that day was a distraction. Denny was the only thing that mattered. I went back to the house where Id crashed for the past few days, my head

spinning, wondering if there was any circumstance in which Denny would touch Blue Moonbeams, continually searching for any other answer that made sense.

Everyone was there: Jen with her glassy eyes and slow smile, Hal with his rants and Country Joe and the Fish bootlegs, Mickey and Jill and Joe humping away continually in various permutations. They already felt like a kind of family. Id only known them days, but I dont think Ive ever since found friends that mattered to me as much as those people.

My bedroll was on bare floorboards with my few possessions scattered around and a stubby candle for a night-light, but it still comforted me. Exhausted, I went to sleep believing Id wake to find Denny lying next to me, that hed finally find his way to me, two hearts drawing each other together across space.

Instead, I dreamed of men becoming butterflies and human beings having their souls drained away until they became robots.

Stimson called at the house around eleven the next day. He looked like some split-personality cat, the top half an English gent in dinner jacket and bow tie, the bottom half the hippest of the hip in purple loons and sandals. The cigarette holder was clenched jauntily between his teeth as he greeted me.

Chicklet! I have news!

Id been sitting on the steps at the front of the house, desperately trying to think of a new approach. I always thought that if you wish hard enough, things happen. The vibes go out and the universe answers; you just had to be open to the endless possibilities of this place that nurtures us. And on that day it seemed I was right.

About Denny?

The man himself. Last night I asked around a few contacts, put a few whispers out on the street, and this morning listened for them coming back. And someone indeed saw your beau. Well, the actual description was some clyde with a jock haircut. He smiled sympathetically. But, you know… if its him…

My stomach did a little flip. It wasnt until my first thought was Hes alive! that I realised how much Id secretly thought Denny was dead. Where, Jack? I wanted to snatch that piece of paper from his hand and race off there and then, ignoring the little voice that still wanted

to know why Denny hadnt called me. Id left notes on all the message boards around the Haight. Everybody checked them. He could have found me. If he was able.

Hey, steady, chicklet. This was some days ago. Dont want to get your hopes up too high.

Its the first Ive heard of him in the Haight at all since he got here.

Okay, but just stay cool. His face darkened.

What is it?

He handed me the paper with its one line address. He was going to see the Goblin.

Id heard the name, but couldnt say where. Stimson read my blank expression.

The Goblin, baby! he stressed, before adding, Hes a heavy, heavy cat. Grooves on some very strange shit. He twirled his finger at the side of his head. If I was going to give you any advice, Id say keep the heck away from him. Hell suck the life right out of you. There are people who go into his place who they say never come out again.

Those words coming from a seasoned professional like Stimson made me even more scared, for Denny. I have to go, I said bluntly.

Yeah, I thought youd say that. Your beau is one lucky cat. He rested one hand on my shoulder supportively. Look, Id offer to come with you, but, like, I value my skin.

Dont worry, I wouldnt ask you to, I said truthfully.

But I gotta say, dont go alone. Get some support. Ten guys, maybe twenty … big ones. He mimed an ogre. With, like, burning torches. We laughed, for a while.

Hal, Mickey and Joe were all sympathetic, but everyone knew the Goblins reputation.

They spent half an hour trying to talk me out of going, but when they realised I wouldnt back down, none of them would accompany me. They eventually drifted off with that lazy distraction that always hides guilt.

I was naive and optimistic and usually filled with the gung-ho attitude

that was getting us in such a mess in the Far East, but all the talk about the Goblin was starting to get to me. I wasnt stupid; never had been.

Naturally I headed for that far-out police box. Something told me that the Doctor, Ben and Polly had adventurous spirits. I could imagine them forging through the deepest Amazonian jungles or climbing some misty mountain in Tibet. For all their English stiffness, they were as nonconformist and daring as anyone in the Haight, and I could only admire that. They were one of us, not one of them.

When I arrived, they were standing in the shade of the trees, deep in conversation.

Something in their body language and the heaviness of their whispers made me cautious. I paused just out of sight, waiting for the right time to break into their circle.

I dont bloody well understand, Ben was saying. Weve got Cybermen, and then weve got those butterfly things Menoptra, the Doctor said. He was distractedly fiddling with some small mechanical object in the palm of his right hand.

Whatever … it doesnt matter. Is this the start of some sort of alien invasion, or what? Ben waved his hand towards the sky with irritation. And which lot do we have to be more worried about: the Cybermen or the Menoptra?

The Cybermen, of course, silly, Polly said. Youd only need a really big net to stop those other creatures.

I think that, perhaps, you are both missing the point, mused the Doctor. We were not attacked by a rampaging horde of Cybermen. We were presented with the head of a single Cyberman. A trophy, if you will.

Ben blanched. Bloody hell. Something that can rip the head off a Cyberman. Polly rolled her eyes. It wasnt a real head. It disappeared. Consider. The Doctor raised a finger. The Menoptra. He was presented to us too, wasnt he? Do you mean that they werent really there, then, in any physical sense? asked Polly. Ben massaged his temple wearily. This is giving me a headache.

Again.

Polly, though, was warming to her theme now. You said before that

they were a message of some kind.

Exactly! The Doctor beamed, clapping his hands together in delight at Pollys observation. But Ben was right, to a degree. Whatever is here has encountered the Cybermen and survived. It also knows that I have met the Cybermen. And the Menoptra.

But how could it possibly know that? Again, Polly was clearly unnerved by this idea.

Im not sure, yet, the Doctor said. I sense that someone is playing a kind of game with me. And whoever it is, Im very much afraid that their abilities may be as far beyond mine as mine are beyond

Ours? Ben flinched and looked away from the Doctors suddenly intense, penetrating gaze. It sounded like a petulant comment caused by the stress of the situation, but it made me shiver. Who exactly was the Doctor?

I seized on the uncomfortable lull in the conversation to step forward. Polly and Ben both smiled warmly when they saw me; the Doctors expression was unreadable.

Hi, I ventured.

Any news? Polly gave me a hug as if we were old friends.

Yeah … maybe. I passed the note with the Goblins address uncomfortably from hand to hand. That reporter from the Oracle said someone had seen Denny.

Thats wonderful, Polly said.

I nodded. Its cool.

Ben obviously saw right through me. But?

They think he might have been with some heavy guy … a dangerous guy. I looked into their faces hopefully. Stimson said I shouldnt go alone.

They both looked to the Doctor, but he was lost in thought. Does this man have something to do with those Blue Moonbeams? he eventually asked.

I dont know. Maybe.

He pondered for a moment, then said, Im sorry, my dear, but Im afraid I have my own, rather pressing business to attend to.

Doctor? Polly prompted. Summer needs help.

But he had already wandered off, lost to that strange mechanical device in his hand.

His voice floated back to me as he entered the police box: See you again soon, my dear.

It was a weird time to be alive. The Age of Aquarius was coming up fast. Suddenly all the certainties my parents had clung to in the 1950s were crumbling. The occult was grooving in the mainstream. You could watch Johnny Carson on one of those TVs in the window of Ellisons on Page and then go next door to get a Tarot reading or listen to Alan Watts lecture on Maya across the bay in Sausalito. There were more witches in the Haight than America had ever admitted to since the Salem trials. It was a time when anything was possible, when every single frontier had crumbled, and that was a very frightening situation to be in. Who could you believe any more? Before, there were pipe-smoking scientists and the bomb and Telstar lighting up the night. In their place we got magic, aliens and, eventually, ley lines. The day after I arrived in the city some guy was on a soapbox in the Panhandle warning everyone that demons really existed, and that they were walking among us, secretly tormenting us. At the time it was nothing, another San Francisco nut, but as I trailed reluctantly through the streets towards the Goblins hang-out, I started to wonder: is that what the Doctor was? There was something about him that was different, otherworldly; most people wouldnt have seen it, but my intuition was stronger than most. Some astrologer on Waller said I had a psychic talent, but I think he was only trying to light my fire.

And whatever it was about the Doctor, it unnerved me; I think it even scared me a little. Would it really have hurt him so much to come with me to see the Goblin? He made me feel like I was nothing. It seemed to me then that he was interested in no one but himself.

All my thoughts drifted away when I finally stood outside the Goblins place. The mind is a powerful thing we can scare ourselves silly with a few crazy thoughts

but I swear I was sensing something about that place beyond what my eyes were telling me. It was a regular brownstone, but obviously a

freak hang-out. Psychedelic graffiti, flowers, peace signs and slogans illuminated the front, while music came out of every open window, twenty different songs at least, all in competition. There were places like it all over the Haight, but this one had a feeling of threat that made me queasy. I looked up at the black windows from which flimsy drapes billowed in the January breeze, but I couldnt see anyone.

The door was open. I stepped into a hallway that had that familiar San Francisco aroma of damp, misty mornings, but beneath it the faint taint of urine. Hello, l called out quietly, then regretted the unnerving whispering effect the echoes made as they rustled along the yellowing wallpaper. I ventured along the darkened hall, the bass notes of the music coming through the walls like the sound of mysterious heavy machinery at work.

Behind the rumbling, small animal noises came from an open door down the hall to my left. I crept up cautiously and peered inside. The room was bare apart from a dirty mattress on the floorboards. On it, a couple were making love, slick with sweat, tripping. The girl was beautiful, with long blonde hair washing around her head as she stared at the ceiling with glassy eyes; she could have been sunbathing on the beach, she was so away from the moment. But the guy was unpleasant in every sense.

His expression wasnt just unloving, it was fierce, as though he hated her, and his long hair and beard were matted with mud like a hobo. It struck me with faint distaste that if not for the drugs the girl would probably never have looked at him twice. Making love wasnt the right description after all.

I carried on by to the stairs, and then up them into the heart of the building. Most of the open rooms were like that first one: people tripping or whacked out, screwing yet completely disconnected. The noises that came from behind the locked doors were even more disturbing.

My mouth was dry and there was a thundering inside me matching the vibrations coming through the walls. On the third floor I found another open door. This room was filled with decaying Victorian furniture, books rotting on the shelves, heavy mildewed drapes drawn across the window, water-stained photographs and paintings on the wall.

In a high-backed leather chair, a young girl watched me with staring eyes. She couldnt have been more than sixteen; the thought that she

might have endured the houses debased regime put me on edge. Her brown hair was cropped in the latest style, but her face looked like it had been smeared with ash from the fire.

Dont hurt me. Her voice was fragile, filled with terror.

Im not going to hurt you I cautiously stepped into the room and checked the shadowy corners. She was alone. As I drew closer, I could see from her pupils that she was tripping. A bad trip. Her breathing was shallow, her body rigid.

Are you one of them? Her eyes grew wider still.

I dropped to my knees, trying to make myself unthreatening, and crawled towards her slowly, smiling. Id had experience of bad trips before. Im here to help you, sweetie. You just take it easy.

She jerked suddenly, snapping her head from side to side as if shed glimpsed something in the shadows. Whats there? She was on the edge of hysteria.

Just me, sweetie. Here to look after you.

No

Just me. I took her hand; it was as cold as ice, as hard as stone, but gradually it relaxed.

We have sunshine in our eyes, she said dreamily. Rainbows sprout like trees …

like fountains. In heaven, all the angels know … we can walk through walls … we can do anything. It was only the briefest moment of calm. Slowly her gaze focused on my face and that look of terror returned. They were born behind the wind. They were there before the sun. Colours … so many colours … And now theyre here.

Listen to me I stroked the back of her hand; she was so scared I was afraid shed hurt herself. Id once seen one guy drive a shard of glass right through his hand in the middle of a trip because he thought he was made of smoke. Its just you and me here…

No, were not alone. Were never alone She snatched her hand free and gripped the arm of the chair as she looked frantically around the room. There! She pointed to one corner near a standard lamp with a broken shade. Her eyes moved quickly to another corner as if she

were following something; a chill ran down my spine.

There!

Look at me, I said gently. She was so adamant I could almost believe she was seeing something, but acid does strange things if your head isnt in the right place.

But she was too far gone. She forced herself up the back of the chair, trying to drive herself away, her face drained of blood. I could smell fear on her, a horrible metallic taint. No! she screamed.

Please, youll be okay.

Suddenly her arm shot up into the air as if it had been yanked. A scream erupted from her throat. I threw myself backwards in shock as she was dragged from the chair by invisible hands. Rapidly, she went across the floor, one arm outstretched into nothing, shrieking in terror.

She mouthed something, but it took an instant for her vocal chords to work: Colours … colours … Colour-Beast The words were choked off.

The sight of her disappearing eerily into the shadows at the far end was too much for me. The last things I saw were her white eyes and white teeth glowing in the dark, before they finally faded.

I should have felt guilty for abandoning her. I didnt; I panicked. But as I scrambled towards the door ready to throw myself down the stairs and out of that nightmarish place, something grabbed at my arm. Only there was nothing there. I screamed, skidded out on to the landing. I got free, but the way Id landed meant Id have to go past the door to get downstairs. The only way was up. I didnt stop to think. I ran.

All the doors I passed were locked. I hammered on them, but no one answered. On the top floor, the final door was made of steel and daubed with a red circle sprouting twin horns. I hit it hard, yelling to be let in. Behind me, I couldnt see anything in the half-light. The drapes on the stairs were all drawn, with only slivers of sun eking through the gaps between them. But as I watched, one of the drapes drew back, then fell shut again. As if something had brushed by it.

My heart rose into my mouth. Before I could cry out, the door at my back swung open and I fell through. It slammed shut instantly and a bolt was drawn. I was looking up into the grinning face of a squat, heavily muscled man. He had long, wiry black hair starting to grey,

and a thick beard. One tooth was missing so that his grin was faintly menacing, while in the middle of his forehead was a home-made tattoo, an A in a ragged circle; dried blood and dirt crusted the edges. Like the others Id seen, he didnt appear to have washed recently. He reached out a hand and pulled me roughly to my feet.

Theres something out there! I said, but he only laughed.

Nobody can get in here, baby. He turned and headed into the main room, clearly expecting me to follow. His voice floated back: And once youre in, you dont get out. Unless I say so.

Youre the Goblin? The minute I said the name, whatever was outside faded into the background.

The question is, who are you?

My names Summer. Im looking for

Summer, Summer, Summer. He laughed, not in a pleasant way. Little freaky-chick.

You want to join our commune?

No

You should. We have a lot of fun here. He sat on a sofa that looked and smelled like it had come straight from the junk heap. I glanced back at the door; I thought I could hear something moving outside.

Whats out there?

He laughed again, obviously unconcerned. Had it been my imagination, or had I misread the situation? Perhaps the girl had moved herself. But as soon as I thought it, I couldnt believe it was true. I tried to put it out of my mind; there was too much risk closer to hand.

Im looking for someone

Everyones looking for someone in the Haight. Or something.

The room had a familiar fragrant smell that just about masked the unpleasant odour of sweat. On the coffee table in front of him were plastic bags full of grass, a large sticky block of hash and a set of brass scales. He saw me looking and flicked open a large switchblade, which he rammed into the hash. Sit. He nodded to an armchair lolling on

three legs.

I could understand why people had been afraid to come. Everything about him said that nothing was beyond him. Id seen his type before, drawn to the freedoms of our movement, but not accepting any of the responsibilities. Most of them were Just petty thieves or users, but at

least they had some scruples. I could see the Goblin had none. My boyfriends missing. I sat primly in the centre of the chair; I didnt like the way he was looking at me. You want to trip? He held out a handful of pills. Its cool.

Theyre Owsley. Are you selling the Blue Moonbeams? It was a stupid question to ask; I should have known better than to discuss his business so openly.

But instead of getting angry, he only sneered. Theyll never push me off the streets. Dumping that shit like theres no tomorrow. Its poison. I dont know what that witch, Mathilda, has got to do with it, but shes in there. Theyre offloading it cheap, but youd have to be crazy to touch it. Kids are dying theyll get the message sooner or later. His eyes narrowed. Why do you want to know about that?

Because my boyfriend might be one of the kids who died. There, Id said it. I took Dennys picture out of my pocket. Someone said they saw him coming here.

This did anger him. Whos talking out of class? The vehemence in his voice scared me.

I dont know their name. I was just showing the picture around town, I lied.

The Goblin seethed for a moment and began to stuff a bag full of grass from a box on the floor. He seemed unbalanced, his reactions unguessable. Too many drugs, I thought. Too much violence.

Have you seen him? I pressed tentatively.

Yeah, hes here.

My heart leapt; I couldnt believe what I was hearing. He is?

Yeah. He needed a place to crash. Hes sleeping right now. He nodded towards a closed door to what I guessed was the bedroom.

I didnt wait, couldnt wait. I was through the door before the Goblin had stood up.

The room was dark and it took my eyes a while to adjust, but the smell of stale sweat was even more pungent. When I finally made out the shapes of the mattress on the floor and a few other minimal pieces of furniture, I could feel the Goblins hot breath on the back of my neck.

Denny? I said tentatively.

The Goblin shoved me roughly so I sprawled on the mattress. Hey! I said, before realising the bed was empty. My hand closed around a discarded piece of clothing.

Something rattled near my arm. Manacles, fixed to the wall above the bed. The mattress itself was bare and covered with dried brown stains that I knew were blood.

I rolled over, ready to run. The Goblin was silhouetted in the doorway, and even though I couldnt see his face I could tell he was grinning. Hed retrieved the switchblade from the hash.

Im not interested. My heart was thumping, adrenaline driving round my system.

Free love, baby. Thats what were about. He undid the button on his trousers and slowly slid the zipper down.

No, I said firmly.

He smiled, like a shark. Cool it. Open your mind. This is a true Haight experience.

This is what were about, he repeated. Turn on. Dont be a square. His voice was laced with irony; we both knew I didnt have a choice.

Then a strange thing happened. For some reason I became aware of the clothing in my hand and realised it was Dennys shirt. Unmistakable, down to the customised peace sign Id scrawled on the back the night we met. And it was covered in blood.

The Goblin read the question in my face. Your Dennys dead, baby. He made a gesture of something blowing away, then laughed. Gone, like dust.

There was some note in his voice that told me this time he wasnt lying. A cold wave washed through me, driving out the fear. I felt sick.

The Goblin advanced, his trousers gaping, the switchblade held to one side. Do it,

I said, lying back. I dont care any more.

He chuckled, dropping his trousers to his thighs as he got himself into position between my legs. In the same instant that he went to his knees, I rammed my feet hard into his groin. His squeal of pain sounded like some pathetic animal. I threw myself off the bed and scrambled to my feet, my breath burning in my throat.

By the time I reached the locked door, I could hear his furious ranting behind me; he sounded like a wild animal. I threw back the bolt and wrenched the door open, not even thinking about the ghost-thing that had been outside. But, even with his unzipped trousers hampering his pursuit, the Goblin was too close. I didnt stand a chance of reaching the street.

Two people suddenly appeared at the top of the stairs. I cried out in shock before I realised it was Ben and Polly. Ben sized up the situation in an instant. He grabbed my wrist and dragged me past him where I fell into Pollys arms; she pulled me away from the door. Approaching madly, cursing and spitting, the Goblin was taken unawares. I saw the startled expression on his face as he attempted to stop his mad-dash, but he couldnt quite manage it.

Ben swung his arm back and hit him hard in the middle of his face as he skidded over the threshold. He tumbled backwards, blood pumping out of his split lip. The switchblade flipped out of his hand, but it was still close enough to grab.

Come on, Ben! Polly yelled. She was already hauling me down the stairs.

Wed gone down one flight when the Goblin appeared over the stair rail above. His bloody face was filled with fury. Ill remember you, chickie! he roared. And you two! Ill be coming for you! You better get out of town, because Im coming!

I dont remember anything else until we were out on the street.

For five days I was lost to despair. Even now, after so many years of suffering that emotion, it still holds its power. Perhaps because it was

the first time. You never forget your first time.

This house is cold; winters not far away. And sometimes it feels like Ive been cold all my life, a chill thats been made worse by the memory of those sun-drenched days when I first arrived in San Francisco.

Its still quiet out there in the New England countryside. No cars driving up the long lane to my isolated hideaway. But hell be coming soon. And then itll all be over, one long nightmare of running and hiding, of hopelessness and misery, giving way to another. Will I die? I think I probably will.

That encounter with the Goblin was a turning point for so many reasons, but it could have been so much worse; then, anyway. If Ben and Polly hadnt been worried enough about me to seek me out, Id probably have been wherever the Goblin dumped all the other bodies.

He was representative of the shadow that moved alongside those bright times, inextricably linked. For the first time in our society women had some empowerment.

And at the same time the Haight was filled with so many getting raped and abused under the guise of free love. While we preached equality, the weak still got crushed by the strong, the innocent swamped by the old, ever-present corruption. Cynical? No, realistic. But I got the impression the Goblin hadnt killed Denny himself, though he was undoubtedly involved in it. There was something in his tone when he told me Denny was dead, and I dont think he would have missed the opportunity to brag about how hed done it.

I spent days and nights in my bed, crushing Dennys shirt to me. It still smelled of him, as if hed only just taken it off and gone out to make a coffee. If I dreamed hard enough, I could almost believe that until I saw the blood. My grief even fractured the memory of what had happened to the young girl in the Goblins house; what I had witnessed was so inexplicable it had become like a dream, so much more unreal than the harsh reality of life and death.

The worst thing was that Dennys killing made no sense. All I could see was a good man, an honest, plain individual who had never harmed anyone, murdered. Not only was it such a painful injustice, I couldnt begin to comprehend why anyone would want to kill Denny.

It felt like the heart had been ripped out of my world, but towards the end of the fifth day I knew I had to replace it with something before I

fell apart completely.

And that was the beginning of the end.

Id been in the I-Thou for an hour, sitting over a cold coffee making plans, when Ben and Polly slipped into the booth opposite me.

How are you, Summer? Polly took my hand sympathetically.

Okay. I think they could both see the lie in my face.

We came round the house a few times, Ben said awkwardly, but your mates said, you know, you werent … up to it. Thanks for being so concerned.

We didnt want to leave you … after what happened. Bens eyes were everywhere apart from on me. But, you know …

You had other responsibilities. I understand. How is the Doctor?

They looked at each other. Giving us a bit of grief, Ben said.

Hes not himself, Polly continued. Hes so wrapped up in this business … more than he normally is.

Hes obsessed, Ben grunted. Thinks its some kind of game.

And you dont? I asked.

Ben leaned across the table conspiratorially. We do, but we reckon its working on two different levels. Whoevers behind this obviously knows the Doctor knows how he thinks and whatll get him intrigued. And is using all this stuff to pull him in.

Why? I asked.

To lure him into a trap. Ben sat back in his seat, nodding adamantly.

Youve told him what you think?

Oh yeah. Its like talking to a brick wall.

Bens right, though, Polly said. Whoever is doing all this knows the Doctor well.

Just yesterday, a boy delivered pieces of a computer … an electronic brain. And the same thing happened. The boy ran off like hed just

woken up, and after a moment the computer parts just disappeared.

But they werent parts of just any computer, Ben broke in. The Doctor recognised that they came from a sort of super-computer called WOTAN, which we had a bit of trouble with a while back. Polly smiled at a secret joke. That was it he was gone for good. Fiddling with his little tinker toys, ignoring us whenever we spoke. We just left him to it.

Youre trying to take my mind off Denny, arent you? I couldnt help but smile at their sheepish expressions that Id caught them out. You dont have to worry about me, really. Ive got something important to do. I was just sitting here, making sure I was up to it.

From what Ive seen, Im sure youre up to anything, Summer, Polly said.

I dont know. I chewed on a nail, stared into the oily reflection in my coffee.

Ive thought about myself a lot over the last few days … about who I am … about why I am who I am. And the thing that keeps coming back is seeing the President get shot. That changed everything in the world, and it changed me inside, too.

Clouds of steam hissed from the gleaming coffee machine at the counter while someone hummed a Beatles song. There was a mellow mood to the place that made me feel safe for the first time in a week.

Theres one real reason why I was drawn to the Haight, I began. Theres a war going on. The two sides are lining up. Everyone here is making a stand, for innocence. But the country the world is in the hands of the other side, the ones who only have cynicism. Theres some horrible corruption eating away at us, and Ive got this terrible feeling this is our last chance. If we dont do something now, itll be like that forever. I have to do something … we all do. If we just sit back, were lost.

Polly and Ben looked at me with the kind of pity people have for someone who is talking from the depths of grief. I didnt care; in my own mind, I was sure.

And the first step is finding out why Denny died. Was it just some crazy, random thing? Youd think, right? But then I go back to that day in Dallas, and thats what they told us then. A lone gunman. A crazy thing. No meaning at all. But the truth is, that was the first shot of the secret war that the people in charge have tried to hide from us with

all their lies. You see, what we stand for is a threat to them.

They cant keep power for powers sake in the kind of world we want. They need the shadows, and lies, and corruption.

Youre saying the people in charge killed Denny? Ben said warily.

No, Im not saying that. All Im saying is that theres a reason why Denny died.

Theres a reason why everyone dies. And I want to find out what it is.

You know, Ben began cautiously, sometimes people just die.

I shook my head. Not this time.

I cant say as I really believe in conspiracies, Ben said.

You know what they say, Ben. Sometimes youre paranoid and sometimes they really are out to get you. I think there is a conspiracy here … something to do with whoevers dumping Blue Moonbeams on the Haight. And I think Denny died because he found out about that. You didnt go through what I did in the Goblins place. Something big is going on, something wild and frightening. I dont know what it is, but Im going to find out.

Maybe you should take a little time off, to think it through, Polly said awkwardly.

Look at it again when youve got over the shock. The doubt was clear on both their faces. They were so convinced that I was inventing this to deal with the shock and the pain, I began to waver a little.

I think perhaps you should listen to Polly, my dear.

I started; I had no idea that the Doctor had come up behind me. It was like hed just appeared out of the shadows; I almost expected to smell brimstone.

I turned to face him, my anger giving me a clear focus. So you think that I should j sit back and do nothing? My parents used to say the same thing: you cant beat the system. Look at the President. You cant beat the system. All the upset Id bottled up threatened to come out in tears, but I wasnt going to let him see me cry; I bit on my lip until the pain made it go away.

It felt like his dark eyes were burrowing into my head. Well, then, he

said, as if wed been talking about a shopping trip. Where do you go from here?

Night had fallen and there was a chill in the air. We stood in the shadows of an alley a stones throw from Buena Vista Park opposite a big house that harked back to the grand old days of San Francisco. It was the arty quarter: the writers Ambrose Bierce and Jack London had lived nearby, and the place shared by the Grateful Dead and their extended family was a couple of blocks west.

Ben and Polly stood behind me. They werent sure about what we were doing, but the Doctor, who had strangely decided to accompany us, was rubbing his hands excitedly.

A party! How exciting!

The house belonged to a witch. Mathildas reputation was known all over San Francisco, attracting a following that included bands, actors, writers, intellectuals, even straight celebrities. She was the heart of an occult network of astrologers, magicians and gurus who provided for the spiritual needs, and egos, of a crowd keen to get a piece of the Age of Aquarius. The Goblin had mentioned her when we were talking about the Blue Moonbeams.

The party-goers had been arriving for the past hour. Id already seen Janis Joplin and a few members of the Grateful Deads entourage and the night was still young. The Oracle had said Ginsberg, Gary Snyder and Kesey were going to be there as well. At other times, as a poet, Id have been wowed to meet any of them.

Well never get in, I said.

The Doctor flexed his fingers. Lets see, shall we?

He scampered across the street and up to the front door, the rest of us hurrying to keep up. The entrance was guarded by an unnaturally tall, muscular man dressed in long black robes. He had a shaven head and he was wearing sunglasses, despite the hour. His swarthy skin emphasised the numerous gold bangles and necklaces that hung off him. He was curious about the Doctor, who did a little jig before bouncing up the steps.

What a fine evening this is, the Doctor said with a theatrical sweep of his arm, and how wonderful it is to be here.

I could see the doorkeeper was intrigued by the Doctors accent. Hey,

do you know the Beatles? he asked.

Ah, the Fab Four! Why, yes I do, the Doctor replied. In fact, it was I who suggested George visit the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi for his spiritual guidance. The doorkeeper looked perplexed. Oh, of course, that hasnt happened yet. But it will happen! Mark my words!

He pulled a recorder out from inside his jacket and proceeded to play Love Me Do

jauntily while performing a crazy dance. By this time a small crowd had gathered.

They laughed and clapped at his antics as he played up to them; the doorkeeper wouldnt be able to turn him away without getting some annoyed comments.

But the Doctor sealed his entrance by finishing his tune with a flourish of his hands that made the recorder disappear. It was a simple bit of stage magic, but in the Haight we were easily entertained. Everyone cheered, and the doorkeeper stood to one side to let us in.

I was a little stunned myself. I hadnt seen that side of the Doctor before. It was almost like he was two people; more, in fact.

Inside the house it was like wed stepped into another dimension, like one of those crazy places Ditko drew in the Dr Strange comics everyone loved. It was designed to stimulate every sense, a heightened atmosphere that had my head spinning the moment wed walked through the door. Incense and joss sticks mingled with the aroma of grass. In rooms where the music wasnt playing, wind chimes and bells jangled, accompanied by the insane rhythms of bongo players. Drapes hung everywhere, velvet, silk, gauze, drifting in a faint breeze through the open windows. Psychedelic lights splayed swirling colours across the walls and ceilings, bubbles floated here and there, and everywhere people were dressed in the most amazing clothes and make-up.

Many of the party-goers wore ornate masks, though some of them were grotesque, and left me feeling faintly uneasy.

Shall we mingle? the Doctor said with a clap of his hands. But as he turned away, I caught a brief glimpse of his face darkening, and I realised what he was doing.

I caught his arm. Youre not here for me at all, are you? This has something to do with your own thing. He looked at me with those

intense eyes for a long moment, then smiled.

Im here for all of us, Summer. Trust me.

I watched his back as it vanished into the crowd.

Ben and Polly came with me as we drifted through the house, mesmerised by the strange, beautiful people and the heady atmosphere of that place. For an hour or more, we mingled as things grew wilder. In one room a couple had sex while a crowd watched admiringly. In another, people lolled on cushions smoking a hookah like in some Middle Eastern drug den. Everywhere people were tripping, hugging each other, whispering weird things as they passed. All the rules of society in the straight world slipped away.

We found Mathilda holding court in a lavishly gothic room on the second floor. She was in her early fifties, with dyed black hair and too much make-up, and like the doorkeeper she was wearing black robes and jewellery that were so theatrical it was pretty obvious, to me at least, that she was playing a role.

Do you think she really is a witch? Polly whispered. You know, a real one who can cast spells?

People say. The Society people swear by her. Theres this story that she caused some minister whod been harassing her to have a heart attack: Ben snorted. Or maybe he just had a heart attack.

A connection fizzed in my brain. Polly must have seen it reflected in my face because she asked, What is it?

When I was at the Goblins place, I saw something. I tried to find the words to describe what had been a terrifying experience. It had come back to me so many times over the days since, but however much I tried, I couldnt explain it at all. Or rather I didnt see something. It was like … a ghost … invisible, but … solid.

It attacked this poor girl.

I expected disbelief, from Ben at the very least, but their faces were deathly serious. We should tell the Doctor, Polly said. This sounds like his kind of thing.

What Im saying, is that if Mathilda is a true witch, she could be controlling whatever it was. I dont know … a demon? I suggested tentatively. Or a familiar?

Do you think?

I dont know, Ben began. Ive seen some funny stuff, but … Youre sure? I nodded. He glanced at Polly. Theres got to be some kind of connection.

We all turned to watch Mathilda. I thought how hard her eyes looked, but all the fabulous people who circled her were entranced. Mathilda made a symbolic gesture and doves flew from a concealed box at the side of her throne. The crowd was wowed, ducking out of the way of the wildly flapping birds, which eventually made their way through the open window.

I wont find out who killed Denny until I know why he was at the Goblins

Youre sure it wasnt the Goblin? Ben said.

Yeah, pretty much. He would have bragged about it if hed done it. Thats the kind of sick person he is. I shuddered at the thought of him leaning over the stairs making his threats; I just prayed hed have more on his mind than to waste time pursuing me. But somehow Dennys death is tied into the Blue Moonbeams, Im sure.

Why do you think that? Ben asked.

You know what I think? That he found out about all the kids dying after dropping that acid and he decided to do something about it. He was always ready to do the right thing. And thats why I loved him. If Id have been honest Id have said I always thought that had been the thing that would get him into trouble.

Behind Mathilda we could just glimpse a doorway, entry through which appeared to be restricted to people who gave a secret knock.

I wonder whats in there? Ben said.

The stash, probably. As I looked around, I occasionally caught some of the masked guests staring at me. It was probably harmless, but it made me feel paranoid.

I reckon we should check it out, Ben continued. It looks important.

Mathilda was entertaining the crowd by spooking out some pretty young thing I vaguely recognised from a couple of movies, so we edged around the walls towards the door.

But before we could try it, it suddenly burst open with such force Polly jumped in shock.

A guy who looked a bit like Jim Morrison burst out and fell to his knees. He was shaking his head and making a noise like some cat in pain. Three masked men dressed like the doorkeeper hurried through the door, their black robes flying.

I could only guess the guy had been dipping into the tabs and was freaking out. But instead of helping him, the musclemen grabbed him roughly. Get him out of here!

Mathilda barked furiously.

Mathildas crew hid the guy from the rest of the people in the room, but his head was turned to us. Id seen bad trips before, but this was nothing like it. His face was twisted with pain. He tore at his clothes, then his cheeks and hair; at first I thought his mind was telling him he was on fire, but there was more to it than that.

He ducked down, croaking, making no sense, and when he raised his head again we were all horrified to see he was changing.

His skin was melting away as he pawed at it, the red sinew clearly visible along with the fine network of capillaries, veins and pumping arteries. Polly clutched at her mouth; Ben choked back his disgust.

And the transformation didnt stop there. The sinew unravelled, the circulatory system grew lighter, faded away, until the bone beneath shone through, gleaming different colours in the psychedelic light show. Two words escaped from his throat, and I could have been mistaken, but they sounded very much like, Colour-Beast. It was as if he could see right through me, through the walls, miles away.

The last thing I saw was his hideous skull gaping at me for help, the huge eyes staring at me in dismay, and then Mathildas cronies bundled him back through the door.

Mathilda had clearly turned the event into a joke, for the hangers-on were giggling, but her gaze was fixed coldly on us. We couldnt deny we had seen something out of the ordinary; we were all pale with shock, frozen in one spot.

After a second, Ben tugged at my arm. Come on, he hissed. Wed better get out of here:

As we hurried away, I was convinced some of the masks broke away from their conversations to follow.

We found the Doctor deep in conversation with Timothy Leary. For his experiments with altered states and the way he preached the spiritual side to the mainstream, Doctor Leary was a bigshot in the Haight lots of people still wore their Timothy Leary is God buttons. Interesting, Leary was saying. So it activates this God Centre in the mind.

Its just a matter of tuning in, the Doctor said. Leary took out a notebook and scribbled in it. I think I might use that, if you dont mind. Ben caught the Doctors eye. He made his excuses with Leary and came over. Quite a visionary, he mused.

Before Ben could explain what wed seen, we were suddenly surrounded by several of the masked party-goers. The Doctor grinned at them and attempted to play the fool again, but I could see from his eyes that he was alert to the situation. If Id known it was a masked ball Id have come suitably attired, he said. As it is

One of the masked men took hold of the Doctors arm forcefully. Do you mind? the Doctor said indignantly. Ben stepped in and there was a brief scuffle. A mask was knocked free and the party-goer abandoned the fight to replace it quickly. I saw his face, though, and it was surprisingly ordinary. In the Haight, where everyone was a freak, a crew cut and clear, cold eyes stood out like some alien race.

I think they would like us to accompany them, the Doctor said ironically. Best not to cause a scene.

Ben plainly wasnt in agreement, but he restrained himself at the Doctors word. The masked men led us back to the room where Mathilda held court the Doctor gave her a little wave and a smile and then we were taken through the mysterious door.

If the house had been weird and intense, what lay beyond the door was even more powerful. The room and the ones beyond it were lit by rotating red and green lights through a slowly changing filter that sent disturbing patterns playing continually. I could feel it affecting me subconsciously, putting my nerves on edge. The door had been soundproofed, for Tomorrow Never Knows blared out loudly on a permanent loop with Lennon repeating his lines from the Tibetan Book of the Dead; it was hypnotic and the repetition gave it a whole new frightening feel. His suggestion to turn off your mind and drift away, to lay down your thoughts and surrender to the void sounded

uncomfortably like an order. All around, figures were slumped in various stages of doped-out bliss. At first I thought they were dead, but occasionally theyd twitch in time to the music or mutter some comment that made no sense.

We were herded through to a private room, still garishly lit, where the masked men stood in a line in front of the door. Come on, Doctor, let me have a go at them,

Ben said above the music, but not so loudly that the guards could hear him.

I dont think so. Theyre carrying guns beneath their robes I felt one. Lets wait and see what unfolds, shall we?

My heart was hammering. I couldnt shake the feeling that we wouldnt get out of there alive. The Doctor, though, was unmoved; it wasnt right that there wasnt even a glimmer of apprehension in that situation.

It is not dying, Lennon said insistently. It is not dying. Mathilda swept in soon after. Without saying a word, she moved slowly along our ranks looking deep into our eyes. Her gaze was uneasy;

I couldnt tell if she was tripping too or if there was something else wrong with her, but it had an unusual quality that suggested she wasnt quite there.

When she had finished, she took a step back and said, Across the heavens, we travel.

Nothing here matters. She gestured around. All ephemeral. Death comes when we least expect it. A kiss on the cheek, a cold touch on the back of the neck. All hearts reach out … in colours … in colours … Her eyes were unfocused; it was almost like she wasnt speaking to us, like she was reaching out to something around us that we couldnt see. I shivered, felt eyes on the back of my head from a corner of the room where nothing stood. I told myself it was Mathilda spooking my imagination.

She looked round at the masked figures then smiled at us and said, They live in a place beyond our lives!

Very interesting, the Doctor said. But if thats all, well take our leave now.

Mathilda shook her head slowly, smiling dreamily. Theyre all around us, all the time, she said softly. Even when you think youre alone.

A whisper rustled past my ear. My hair was stirred by the motion of the unseen. I glanced at Polly and Ben; they could feel it too. Suddenly I couldnt shake the sight of that poor girl being dragged into the shadows by invisible hands in the Goblins house.

Theres something here, I said, moving closer to Ben. Mathildas beatific state faded and she examined us again before making a dismissive gesture. Nobodies. Give it to them.

Two of the guards grabbed me roughly and dug their fingers sharply into my jaw so they could force open my mouth. I struggled, but they were too strong. The others were also being restrained; only the Doctor didnt fight back. One of the masked men produced a small pill ready to drive it into my mouth. I glimpsed the pattern on it

Blue Moonbeams.

The Doctor freed one arm and plucked the pill from his captors hand, tossing it into his mouth with a broad grin. The rest of us gagged as the pills were thrown down our throats. There was a brief moment of chaos as Ben fought back. One of the guards punched him hard in the stomach, forcing him to swallow. Polly choked; tears sprang to her eyes.

It is not dying. It is not dying.

I managed to catch the pill on the tip of my tongue and pin it to my cheek, before feigning dismay as I collapsed to my knees, my hair falling across my face so no one could see. The chalky substance of the pill started to dissolve; I had to get it out quickly before the acid seeped into me through the soft tissue. But I couldnt do it while the guards were there; theyd only make me take another.

Thats enough now, Mathilda said to the guards.

As they all moved out, I spat the pill into my hand and threw it away with disgust. I could already feel a subtle change beginning; the music was becoming more intense, the colours on the wall glowing with a strange inner quality.

The Doctor hurried over, his own pill held in his open hand where hed cleverly palmed it with a little of his stage magic. Once he saw I was okay, he turned his attention to Polly and Ben. Quickly, he said.

Theres still time. We have to make them vomit up the pills. Can you do that?

I nodded, but my attention was wandering to the strange patterns the lights were making on the walls. Oddly, shadows appeared to be flickering on the edge of my consciousness, like when a strobe starts. But it wasnt a pleasant experience; something was starting to scratch at the back of my mind.

The Doctor took my shoulders firmly. Summer, I need your help. You must concentrate.

I turned quickly to Ben as the Doctor cradled Pollys head and then forced his fingers deep into her mouth. I did the same with Ben; I could see in his roving eyes the dim beginnings of a trip.

They both rolled over and threw up the pills, which were still whole. That should have done the trick, the Doctor said. The effect will be minimised … and lets hope the more sinister side will be curtailed.

We helped Ben and Polly to their feet; from the way their eyes darted around the room, I could tell they too were experiencing the illusion of things moving.

Colours, Ben said with a note of tension.

Polly nodded forcefully. Colours … Her eyes grew fearful, fixed on one spot. I could see a shadow of something in the same place. Brightly coloured stars appeared to be bursting within it. I think Polly could see it more clearly because the drug had had longer to reach her system.

I remembered what the girl had said, the man undergoing the hideous transformation.

The Colour-Beast, I whispered. Polly stared at me with wide eyes and nodded.

We need to get out of here very quickly, the Doctor said. I fear something very unpleasant is about to take place.

It felt like there was a rat loose in my head. I had the horrible sensation that somebody else was inside me; I convinced myself I could hear their thoughts crackling next to mine, merging, writhing in and out with lashing tails.

Somehow we stumbled into the next room where the music thudded madly and the lights streamed like rainbows. It was like a scene from hell. The people that had been slumped all around were in the throes of the terrible transformation we had witnessed earlier. They were at different stages: some were rubbing their hands over their faces and hair in terror, while others staggered around as their flesh peeled back or their capillaries unravelled; a few were bone and clothing. Others simply winked out, leaving an impression, like starlight on my retina, but I felt that once the trip took hold, Id be able to see them again. The noise of their torment was so terrible it even rose above the music.

Is this going to happen to us? Polly shrieked. The Doctor took her hand and pulled her so she could look into his eyes; she calmed instantly.

Ben was scratching at his scalp as if he were trying to tear something out of his head. The Doctor turned his attention to Ben and managed to ease him too.

We backed into the smaller room as the shapes raged around with increasing craziness; even with the room half-empty we could still hear the violent movement of many bodies careering off each other, attacking each other. Disembodied howls made me feel sick; made me want to cry.

The Doctor slammed the connecting door shut. Ben was not so far gone, and the more he focused, the more I could see him shucking off the effects of the Blue Moonbeams.

Polly slumped in the middle of the floor, her head in her hands. Whats happening?

she whimpered; the drug had touched her emotion centre just enough to send her feelings wheeling out of control.

I could see they both, secretly, felt like me. Even with such a slight touch of the acid, would we go the way of the people in the other room?

And so we waited, for an hour or more, until all the sickening sound in the other room had died away. And even then I didnt dare enter, but the Doctor took control.

As he strode into the silent room and looked around, I thought: Dont you feel anything at all?

Where have they all gone? I asked. No one answered.

I think were going to be all right, Polly said tearfully.

Not like those poor beggars, Ben mumbled. I looked around the seemingly empty room and saw four bodies lying in the shadows where the swirling lights didnt touch. I inspected the closest. He had torn the shirt from his back the remnants were still clutched in his dead fingers

and the marks of his own nails raked his torso.

I dont know what prompted it, but I felt an instinctive tingling. I pulled the tattered shirt free and held it up. The light played over it, red, green, red, green, showing up the dark stains. The blood formed patterns exactly like the ones on Dennys shirt.

It is not dying. It is not dying.

Connections began to form in my mind, but I refused to face up to them. Why didnt he disappear like the others? I asked feebly.

Maybe, like any other drug, the Doctor replied, it has different effects on different people.

Acid cant kill you. My voice sounded strained, tiny; I wasnt really aware what I was saying. All I could think of was why the blood patterns were the same as those on Dennys shirt.

This can, the Doctor said. He glanced at me, and I had the strangest feeling he was reading my mind. I looked away. If we get out of this place, he said in an almost detached tone, perhaps it would be better if you left this city immediately. Youre not up to what lies ahead.

That made me angry. Im seeing it through, I snapped. I walked away from the body and looked around the room. We cant go out the way we came in. And Im betting theyll be in here any minute. I noticed a square every now and then taking shape out of the shadows shifting across the ceiling: the entrance to the roof-space. Up there, I pointed.

Ben was drifting again, and dragged himself back with irritation. Come on, then. No point hanging around. He held his hands in a cradle to lever me up.

We scrambled up into the dust, damp and dark, the music now a dull ache beyond the rafters. The Doctor carefully closed the trap after us;

Mathilda would think wed gone the same way as the others. Dead? Disappeared? I really didnt know any more.

All I could think about was Denny, how his death must have been so terrible; I couldnt help tormenting myself. I was a mass of raw emotions, but the irony wasnt lost on me: Id come to San Francisco in search of a new life, but what Id found was death.

Yet, even so, I still believed. I had to do the right thing for Denny. What we felt in our hearts was true, and though wed suffered so terribly, it was still the light in the dark. I wiped away my tears, trying to think what Denny would have wanted me to do, and kept going.

When I look back to those times, it feels like Im observing another person: a child, cosseted, who still hadnt worked out how the world works. How stupid I was, how pathetic and naive. Yet that short time in Haight-Ashbury is still so clear in my memory, every image in sharp definition, the smells, damp misty mornings and sunlight on brick and the ever present smell of grass, the constant background chatter of lively people and the music that soundtracked a generation. Why does such a brief experience have so much potency, especially when it ended so badly?

The years that followed the hitch-hiking, buses and trains, a succession of grim, industrial cities and YWCAs, loveless sex, sex for food, money or lodgings, sex for comfort it all merges into one dreary mass. An abstract, characterised by despair and fear, that sooner or later hed catch up with me; that it all would.

The evil that was loose in that town that day hasnt faded away like all those poor people who took the Blue Moonbeams; its got stronger.

For a long time, I thought this house would be my sanctuary. It was bought with the proceeds of a hundred dead end jobs, every cent stored away before I moved on to the next town. All those dreams of being a poet evaporated early on; there was no poetry in my life; no poetry in America.

I guess I was stupid thinking I could hide away here forever, on the edge of the country. From the outside, the house looks like its falling down hanging gutters, fallen tiles, swinging shutters. Nobody ever visits. For five years it was a place to rest and be alone with my thoughts.

And then the phone that never rang, rang; and I knew that he was coming.

Back there in the Haight we used to wish every day; we really believed if we wished hard enough it would all come true. If I had one wish now it would be to get back what remains of my future. But its too late for that.

We got out of Mathildas place through a service hatch on to the roof. Dawn was just streaking the horizon gold and purple, the sky lightening so that I could almost believe I could see all the way to the bay. Down below, the streets were filled with mist, ghostly, touching the city with magic. I could have stayed up there forever.

We made it down a fire escape and hurried down empty roads to my place, our footsteps coming back in deadened echoes so that we often stopped in fear that someone was following us. By that stage, the only remnant of the trip was a faint fuzziness on the edge of our vision; the scratching in my mind was long gone and for that I was immensely thankful.

When I reached the house it was immediately clear something was wrong. The front door hung on shattered hinges. In my room my things were scattered around, smashed, my bedroll torn to pieces. Jen emerged from her room at the sound of my voice. Her left eye was swollen shut and her lip split.

What happened? I hardly dared ask.

Jen fell into my arms. The Goblin, she sobbed. He was after you, Summer. He wants you dead.

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I couldnt stay there. The Goblin wouldnt give up. Hed be back sooner or later, and even if I hid hed take it out on my friends. I salvaged what I could from my possessions and told Jen that Id find somewhere else, but Polly put her arm round my shoulders and said supportively, You should let us look after you for a while. Itll be safer.

I looked to the Doctor, but he was staring into space, preoccupied. I guess I wanted him to make the offer I still wanted to think good things of him but it seemed then that he wasnt interested at all.

We spent the remaining hours until morning in an all-night café. Ben, Polly and I all dozed off for a while in our seats, but the Doctor didnt seem even remotely tired, and shortly before dawn he abruptly got up and left. After the rest of us had had some breakfast health food and ice cream we finally felt able to talk about what wed seen the

previous night, and how close wed come to death.

That Mathilda is a witch in more ways than one, Polly said.

Ben picked seeds from his teeth, examining them distastefully. And shes got her own private army going on.

But whats the point of it? I said tearfully; my emotions were all over the place.

It doesnt make any sense. Why feed people the drug if you know its going to do that to them?

Youre not going to make any money from it, are you? Ben agreed. The effects are pretty terminal.

Maybe she doesnt like young people, Polly mused. Take a bite from this apple, Snow White.

I shook my head. The word would soon get round. I cant believe she was doing it there, at her place. When all those kids dont come home from her party, what are people going to say?

Desperate, Ben said.

What?

I said, she seemed desperate. You could see it in her face when she came in to us.

Like we might mess everything up.

Like time was running out, Polly added.

I closed my eyes and saw skin peel back from flesh, fall away from bone. She is a real witch, I whispered. She must have real powers to do something like that to those kids. Maybe every single pill is a spell, transforming them into demons.

The Colour-Beast. Ben looked away; Id never seen him look so disturbed. Thats what they called it. You saw it?

I dont want to talk about it. He picked up the empty ice cream cartons and took them over to the trash can, busying himself so he didnt have to think.

It was coming out of those poor kids. Or they were becoming it. Polly

stared into the middle distance, pale and uneasy. I didnt really see it. I think the drug was helping me … but it was becoming clearer. There were colours … lots of amazing colours. At first the shape wouldnt settle down, it kept moving all the time, and it felt like my mind was having trouble pinning it down. And then the beast started to come out. It looked She put a hand to her mouth to stifle a gag.

Demons, I said. Id never been much of a church person, but my grandmother was Southern Baptist; shed understand.

Shes planning something. Ben had returned from dumping the trash. Everything thats been happening has been some kind of test.

You think?

I wish the Doctor would take more of an interest in this, Polly said wistfully. He would work it out.

We dont need him, I said firmly. If youre with me, lets go find out about Mathilda.

Stimson was typing furiously, surrounded by a cloud of smoke, his cigarette holder stuck out dangerously. Greetings, cat and chicklets, he said through clenched teeth when he saw us. Just let me finish these pearls of wisdom another great exclusive!

Pulitzer here I come! and then Ill be with you.

We managed to find a few square inches not covered with piles of paper and roaches and watched the other journalists go about their business. Music filled the air a live tape of Country Joe and The Fish singing I Feel Like Im Fixin To Die and the fragrant smoke drifted everywhere. I couldnt imagine straight newspaper offices being like that: there wasnt a touch of cynicism in the earnest conversations or absurd asides, and the level of dedication was remarkable; they truly believed in the people and subjects they were writing about.

Eventually Stimson came over, riding his wheeled chair like a tricycle. He eyed me seriously: How was the Goblin? Did he let you across his bridge?

That was a troll, Ben said. Stimson waved him silent.

Hes after my blood. But I can deal with that

Whoa! Theres fire in you, girl!

We want to know about Mathilda

The Witch of Buena Vista? Stimsons curiosity was piqued. Whys she suddenly the dame of the day?

I told him what happened, leaving out the part about the transformations; a lack of cynicism goes only so far.

He whistled through his teeth. So shes behind the Blue Moonbeams. Thats crazy.

Whats she going to get out of that? She doesnt have to deal shit. Shes got enough moolah and influence from all those sappy celebrities who hang around her all the time.

Thats what we want to know. Whats her background?

He headed for a filing cabinet and came back with a cuttings file, which he leafed through quickly. Shes got all the right credentials. Former member of the Theosophical Society, friends with Krishnamurti, studied Ouspensky and Gurdjieff, visited Gerald Gardner shortly before his death. She started her coven down in LA where she met all her high profile buddies. Moved up here eighteen months ago. He unfolded cuttings and scanned quickly. She became a mover and shaker pretty quickly shes cute when it comes to publicity. Telling how her magic works … usually after the fact. Nothing here to show why shed get wrapped up in a scam like Blue Moonbeams. For such a publicity hound, rumours about kids vanishing and all that horseshit can only be a bad thing. Dig?

Shes bloody well planning something big, Ben said. Id stake my life on it.

I told you kids, theres only one big thing happening round here the Human Be-In tomorrow night. The whole country is talking about it … heck, maybe the world, even in the straight press. That Summer of Love is on its way, and it starts here. Yeah, its getting hyped … the Diggers hate it, think its going to bring a lot of undesirables to the Haight … like we havent got enough already, right? But its going to get the message across to everybody whose hair stays above the collar. This country is changing. The shirts and ties, the greedheads, the politicians, the generals theyre getting a wake-up call that the people are on the move and theyre not going to take their crap any more.

I felt a surge of excitement and pride at Stimsons words; it was what we all believed in, what we were fighting for, and I really felt we

could win.

So could Mathilda be going to the Human Be-In? Polly had grown serious; shed latched on to something.

Everybody whos anybody is going to be there. And, yeah, Mathilda, shes got a big part to play. Stimson fetched his notebook from his desk and proceeded to read.

Shes carrying out a big ritual at the event… going to magic our guys back from Vietnam … stick one in Johnsons eye. I told you she had a handle on publicity.

So it would be easy for her to hand out the Blue Moonbeams to the crowd, Polly suggested.

Ben and I froze; we were both picturing the same sickening image. Why would she do a thing like that? Ben asked.

How many are supposed to be going? Polly said.

Its going to be big, big, big, Stimson said. Everybody in the Haight every mover and shaker from Leary and Ginsberg to Janis and the Dead … and theyre going to be coming from all over the West Coast. He raised his eyes while he worked up a figure. Say, maybe, twenty-five thousand?

We came out of the Oracle offices in a daze. If the Blue Moonbeams were dropped by the crowd at the Human Be-In, it would be an atrocity.

We could go to the police, Polly suggested.

I laughed. Theyd probably come down and help hand out the tabs.

She wouldnt do a thing like that, Ben said, as if trying to convince himself.

What would she get out of it?

It wasnt a question any of us could answer, but it left us in a bleak mood as we set off to try to find the Doctor.

The Doctor emerged from his police box to find us waiting outside. He was tossing up and down one of the Blue Moonbeam pills hed obviously saved from Mathildas place.

Very strange, he mused, half to himself, before turning his attention fully to us.

Ive given this a thorough going-over, and theres one element in it that I cant identify.

The bit thats responsible for what happened to all those poor sods, Ben said.

I expect so.

I was pleasantly surprised that the Doctor had taken time out from his own investigations to examine the tab. I told him our suspicions about the Human Be-In, and his face darkened. You think that could be what shes planning? I asked.

I think Mathilda is a very dangerous woman indeed. He tossed the pill one more time with distaste, then dropped it into his pocket. Something must be done.

The plan was quite simple in the telling get into Mathildas house, render her stash of Blue Moonbeams unusable with an acid-based concoction that the Doctor had brewed up, then get out but Ben, Polly and I all realised that it was nigh-on impossible to achieve. Any optimism I had felt about the Doctors increasing interest in the Blue Moonbeams had vanished when he had declined to come with us. And when wed arrived at the gloomy, gothic house, even the thin hope wed nurtured had blown away.

The house was dark and empty, Mathilda and her entourage had long gone. Ben managed to break in through the roof-space that wed used the previous night, and let Polly and me in the front door We searched the place from top to bottom, but found nothing incriminating. The bodies were gone, the bloodstains wiped up, no stash of Blue Moonbeams anywhere.

Shes gone to a bolt-hole, Ben said redundantly.

Where do we go now? Polly hugged her arms around her against the growing chill.

Back to Jack? He might have an idea where shes gone.

Hes somewhere down at the preparations for the Human Be-In doing interviews, remember? I said disconsolately. Alan Cohen, one of his editors and the Oracles co-founder, was an organiser and the whole

staff had been drafted in to report on it.

Then it struck me: The Diggers.

The free food people? Ben led the way along the street. Nearby a few people were listening to a guy playing Dylan numbers on a guitar.

There are two kinds of people in the Haight, I said. Theres the art crowd the sit back and smoke and paint and make music and write crowd. And there are the activists the fighters, the change the system crowd, the people who get things done.

And the Diggers are the fighters? Polly said.

Yeah, theyre artists too, a lot of them … poets, painters and street actors. But theyve got this idea of a socialist utopia … theyre named after some ancient English commune or something. Anyway, they hand out free food in the Panhandle, and theyre always hitting the local businesses to get them to distribute their profits to the community.

I wish them luck! said Ben, cynically.

The thing is, they meet everybody. They might have some idea where Mathildas gone.

Ben stopped suddenly and looked behind us.

Theyll be there at this time of night? Polly asked.

Theres somebody around all the time.

I thought I saw someone behind us … following, Ben said.

Strands of pearly mist drifted across the street. We watched for a while, but nothing moved.

Youre just spooking yourself, I said.

Ben shrugged, but he didnt look convinced.

There were lamps along the main paths through the park, but they barely made a mark on the darkness that turned the trees into an inky pool. Along the skyline, though, I could see the glittering lights of the city. It was funny; I rarely thought of the rest of San Francisco, the streetcars and the hills, the rich suburbs and the bay. To me, the Haight was everything; the first psychedelic city-state like all the

hipsters called it.

Ben had been unusually jumpy for most of the journey, but there hadnt been any sign of anything out of the ordinary. He calmed a little when he heard the sound of workers doing last-minute construction on the stage for the Human Be-In in the distance, and there were still people milling around in a state of anticipation of the next day. A few tents were scattered here and there among the trees. For once the cops were leaving them alone, instead of giving them a help along with their nightsticks or busting freaks for vagrancy.

A few Diggers hung around a trestle table where they offered hot vegetable soup to anyone who passed. We took up their suggestion itd been a long time since breakfast and started chatting to a guy called Spooner. He was in his early twenties with long brown hair tied back with a stars and stripes bandana. After a while we got the conversation round to Mathilda.

Yeah, I saw her earlier. Crazy chick, he said.

Any idea where she might have gone? Polly asked.

He shrugged. She was hanging out with these clydes. They took off in some limo. I dont know, they looked like the Combine, you dig?

I nodded, and tried to ignore Bens blank expression.

Maybe shes cutting and running. This Summer of Love crap is going to be the end of the Haight.

You dont like it?

Its all hype, man. Itll get out of hand. Theyll be coming from all over to get a piece of what weve got going here, and theyll wreck it: He stared off into the shadows dismally. I dont know, man I always thought that Mathilda was a one-percenter, but these days too many people are giving up and going for the green.

We drifted away until we were out of earshot, and then I explained to Ben and Polly that Spooner thought Mathilda had sold out.

So shes gone off to spend her cash from the drug deals, Ben said. And weve got no idea where she might be.

Our mood wasnt good as we wandered off the path to take a shortcut through the trees, heading in the direction of the Doctors police box. I

had an awful sense that things were slipping away from me, that I really was as useless as I feared that day in Dealey Plaza. This is a nightmare, I said. Nothing makes any sense any more.

You should see some of the things that weve seen with the Doctor, Ben said, distracted. Nothing ever makes sense.

Polly noticed Bens wandering concentration. Whats wrong? she asked.

He shook his head, forced a smile, but continued to cast furtive glances into the dark among the trees. A prickling sensation tingled up and down my spine. We continued in silence for a few yards until I caught movement away to my left.

Theres someone following us, I hissed.

Before Ben or Polly could respond, several figures burst out of the undergrowth. I let out a scream and tried to run, but they were on us in an instant. I smelled sweat and dirt as they roughly grabbed my hands and forced them behind my back. Somebody whispered something disgusting in my ear. Foul breath wrapped itself around me.

They restrained Ben with a few punches and then someone hit him across the face with a lump of wood; he sagged like a plug had been pulled. Polly was out of my line of vision, her cries muffled by a hand.

I told you Id get you.

Terror came like a rush of ice-water. I tried to tear myself free in a frenzy of struggling, seeing clearly what lay ahead.

The Goblin stepped into a pool of moonlight. He gave off such a menacing aura that I stopped struggling, mesmerised; it was hopeless. There were at least ten of them, strong and wiry and free of scruples. The Goblin held his switchblade loosely as he approached, snake-like. What I saw in his face made me feel like I was going to be sick.

I told you, he repeated. I call the shots round here. I tell people what to do. If I say vanish … He made a chopping motion with his hand, then followed it with a minor explosion of fingers. Poof. Those are the rules. Where do you get off breaking them? Who do you think you are? He sneered. Looking for your crutch … But hes gone, gone, gone. I couldnt control my expression. Whats the matter? he continued. Cant take the truth? No point living in dreams, baby.

He brought the switchblade up to my neck, but however much I tried to press away, the thug at my back held me tight. The tip of the knife bit into my collar bone, then moved up to my throat. He was getting his kicks and I wasnt going to let him; somehow I managed to find some strength, get some diamond in my eyes. He didnt like it when he saw that. He wanted me scared.

He leaned in close and whispered into my ear. Its going to hurt. He pulled back, his face darker and harder now. First you, then the witch. Shes not going to push me out of the Haight.

There was a sound like the wind in the stillness beyond him. Then one of his filthy henchmen suddenly crumpled to the ground; it was eerie, so unreal it felt like a dream. The Goblin turned, puzzled. Get up, he snapped, as if the guy was playing some kind of game. Even I could see he wasnt moving.

Another moan of wind, another thug falling hard. I saw fear blaze in the eyes of the other henchmen, the whites gleaming in the moon. The hands around me loosened their grip and I pulled free, darting into the trees. Polly was close behind, supporting Ben.

When we looked back, it was sickening but hypnotic. They were running, but fell mid-stride. Their pale skin split open in mysterious straight lines, tear marks slowly extending, four together. An arm came off, a tuft of long hair and part of a scalp.

Blood misted the air so that briefly everything took on a red hue. It was trippy.

And then they were screaming, the sounds so horrible I clutched on to a tree in shock, wishing I couldnt hear. They didnt know what was happening, didnt know where to run. The Goblin stood at the centre, defiant, but the fear was starting to rise in his eyes too, and though I hated myself it felt good to see it.

The last of his thugs fell and it seemed like he was finally ready to run, but it was too late. As we watched, he just came apart; it looked like hed gone through a bacon slicer. There was a crumpling, and blood like rain, and that last doomed, stupid expression that Id never forget.

I was jolted out of it by Ben grabbing my shoulder. Witchcraft, I whispered, dazed.

Shes called something to kill them. We ran, not looking back, before it

came for us.

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JFK. The first shot in the war. We interrupt this programme to bring you a special bulletin … MLK. Ive been to the mountaintop … I dont mind. Like anybody Id like to live … Bobby. Senator Kennedy has been shot. Is that possible? Oh, my God! Get that gun, get that gun …! We dont want another Oswald! Then John, outside the Dakota Buildings while Yoko looked on. All you need is love. All those lone gunmen.

Crazy world, crazy life. Sometimes, in my bleaker moments, I think people need to take more drugs. Yes, theyre filthy and dangerous and screw you up, but if theres one thing hallucinogens teach you, its to make connections. They speak to that very old part of the brain, the real you lurking at the back of your head and talking in a language the fake at the front cant understand. That real you knows everything we see around us is a mask for the truth that lies behind it, where things are joined secretly across time and space, hidden relationships, subtle cause and effect, complexity so intense it can baffle logical probing. Sometimes you just have to feel.

There isnt a person whos dropped acid or taken mushrooms who doesnt know about the telepathy, the way at times you know exactly what someones thinking and they know what youre thinking. But try telling that to people who havent taken hallucinogens; its something that cant be communicated unless its been experienced. Like religion, I suppose. In the same way, its impossible to communicate those connections that exist behind the patina of our lives to someone who doesnt already know theyre there.

Lone gunman. Lone gunman. Lone gunman. Lone gunman. Twice is a coincidence. Yet still people deny the pattern.

And as long as the majority denies it, were left with a consensus reality where people like me people who only wanted the best from life are seen as outsiders.

This isnt my reality at all. No wonder Ive been on the run for the better part of forty years.

I often wonder if we could have done more, if things would have turned out differently. The human race is very good at assimilating

bad situations and making do. The only time it hurts is when people see how it could have been. And no one does see, because the picture is controlled.

But just how long can you keep assimilating? How much despair can you soak up? I think you can exist in an atmosphere of pointlessness for only so long before you have to face facts, and I think Ive reached my limit. I made a good fist of it.

Years and years of running and misery and fear. No one could say I didnt try. Not that.

Ive got a gun. The big-time gangsters would probably laugh at it, but its enough to do the job. Dont get me wrong, I dont relish it. Im scared Ill make a mistake, take half my face off but still be alive, to suffer even more. But there really isnt any point carrying on. When he gets here, my life will be over anyway.

The question now is when to do it. When I see the lights splaying over the dark countryside, when I feel the tread on the front porch, the creak of the door handle, the step on the stairs? When is the right time to kill yourself?

We were pursued through the trees, Im sure of that, but when we finally emerged into the open, the terrible feeling of dread that we had felt seemed to lift, and we realised that we had escaped. When we reached the Doctors police box, we lay against the side of it for several minutes, breathing heavily and shaking. Ben was sprayed with blood from the wound on his forehead.

Then the Doctor suddenly emerged, beaming from ear to ear. I have it! he said.

Simple, when you get to the heart of it! Symbolic communication thats what its all been about. All the things presented to me were representative.

What? I said sharply, scarcely believing my ears.

Communication is the transmission of ideas or information in a language that the recipient can understand, he lectured. If there isnt a shared verbal language, then the best thing is the universal language of symbols. The Cyberman, the Menoptra, WOTAN it all makes perfect sense!

Dont you care about anyone apart from yourself? Bottled-up emotion

came rushing out in tears of frustration and anger. I motioned to Ben who was clutching a handkerchief to his head wound. Look at him your friend. And Polly terrified.

Weve been through this terrible thing and all youre concerned about is your stupid puzzle!

The Doctor looked taken aback. Summer, its okay, Polly said.

No, its not okay. I caught myself and turned away. Ben placed a hand on my shoulder; it was a simple gesture, but from someone as restrained as Ben, it said the world. I couldnt understand how someone like the Doctor could have such loyal helpers. I hope you appreciate them, I snapped.

Oh, I do, I do. He gave Bens wound a cursory inspection. That wont need stitches youll be over it in no time. And Polly, are you well? She nodded. There we are, then. I gather you met a little opposition at Mathildas house?

Ben told him what happened. He was intrigued by the description of the deaths of the Goblin and his men.

Witchcraft, you say? He sniffed. I dont think thats very likely. Particularly as it doesnt exist.

Then what was it? I said. What is this Colour-Beast?

The Doctor raised a finger. Ah, now there is the question. But back to the matter at hand symbolic communication. I sighed; he watched me for a moment through narrow eyes before continuing. Symbolism is the secret language we use to communicate with our gods, with our own true selves … and there are some who say thats one and the same. It is the language of magic, mythology, politics … its around us all of the time, but most of us are blind to it and to its overwhelming power to shape our lives.

I slumped to the foot of the police box, inexplicably overcome with thoughts of Denny; I felt like crying. So youve broken the code. Whoopee.

He seemed oblivious to my sarcasm. Consider: the Cyberman. What is he?

A bloody nightmare, Ben muttered.

The Doctor tutted. In essence, the Cyberman is a man transformed into a cold, merciless killing machine. Then we have the Menoptra.

The butterfly-man, I said. Something was tingling at the back of my mind.

That is it exactly! the Doctor exclaimed. From, admittedly limited, perception, it is a butterfly a creature that undergoes a transformation from ugliness to beauty.

And then we have a component from the master computer WOTAN … an integral piece from a wider, malign organisation. He held out his hands as if we were supposed to understand, then shook his head when all he saw were blank faces. This is leading us forward, he said firmly.

This is leading us into a trap. Ben stood firm. Whoever is sending you these messages knows your mind, Doctor. He knows youre going to be intrigued.

And I am intrigued!

Thats right. So youll follow wherever they lead.

Oh, dont you be so sure of that, Ben, the Doctor said sniffily.

Ben grunted, but he didnt look convinced. He sneaked a secret glance at Polly; I could see they were both still concerned that the Doctors excitement would cloud his judgement and lead us into trouble.

Although I couldnt grasp what the Doctor was trying to say, those mysterious, unseen connections began to cause echoes in my deep mind. A man transformed into a ruthless killing machine, I repeated. Thats whats been happening with the kids who took Blue Moonbeams.

Of course it is! he said, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

I looked at him for a long moment while he silently encouraged me to continue. The messages to you … whats been happening in the Haight … with Blue Moonbeams and the Colour-Beast … and Denny … Theres a link, I suggested tentatively.

More than that! he said. One and the same.

How long have you suspected?

Oh, there was never any doubt. Too much of a coincidence. They had to be connected.

Why didnt you say something earlier?

He clapped his hands excitedly; it seemed I was already forgotten.

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We again spent the hours of darkness at the all-night café, afraid that whatever had slaughtered the Goblin and his men was still roaming around the Panhandle. When we finally emerged in the thin light of a San Franciscan dawn, preparations for the Human Be-In were already well advanced. We made our way cautiously to the Polo Grounds where the event was taking place. Most activity was centred on the stage where roadies swarmed like ants, but there was already a steady stream of freaks coming in from all directions, in floppy hats and bellbottoms, customised jackets and tie-dyed T-shirts, necklaces and bangles, long hair blowing in the breeze, bedrolls and haversacks hung at hipster height. The Gathering of the Tribes, Stimson had called it, and here they were, a disparate group uniting under one belief.

Watching them, I had a surge of the bright optimism I felt when I first came to the Haight. Here was our generation, conjoined by peace and love and a belief in a better world. In the silvery morning, I felt they could overcome anything. It was going to be a hell of a party.

We moved into the park cautiously, searching for anything out of the ordinary, but it was a futile task; everything was out of the ordinary. Ben and Polly went off in a separate direction to see what they could find. Do you really think Mathilda will be here in person? I asked. Wed spent the night filling the Doctor in on our fears.

I would think the kind of woman you described wouldnt be able to stay away, the Doctor said. At least, not until the carnage begins.

You think were right? That it will all happen here?

He gave me a look that had the strangest hint of pity, as if he knew something I didnt. Remember the butterfly: this is the moment when your nascent movement transforms into something quite beautiful.

The Summer of Love? He made an expansive gesture. Feel the energy here. Given the opportunity, this could change the world. But if those Blue Moonbeams get passed around, it will all be

destroyed.

He nodded slowly.

I wish Denny were here.

For perhaps the first time I glimpsed something like honest kindness in his face; it was odd, but kind of good. You dont need Denny, Summer. You miss him, but you have your own strength within you, I can see that.

But what are we going to do, Doctor? How can we stop this happening? His attention was now focused on the crowd as he turned in a slow arc. What are you looking for?

A sign.

From whom?

The one whos been contacting me.

You dont think hes playing a game with you?

No, Summer, I dont.

What, then?

He wouldnt look at me; hed grown troubled once again, drifting into his own intense world. He set off through the crowd, with me trailing after him, scared and increasingly desperate, but filled with fire that Denny shouldnt have died for nothing.

We found Timothy Leary playing pattycake with a little girl. He smiled and nodded to the Doctor. Wait till you hear my speech, he called.

The Diggers were handing out free sandwiches while the Quicksilver Messenger Service played their mercury communique of transformation. The Hells Angels were all over the place, menacing in their leathers and denim, big bellies and beards, pussycats in action. They were reuniting lost children with their parents, shepherding the space cadets to calmer places where they could come down in peace, generally spreading the message of goodwill to all.

And the day passed in a haze of sunlight, bubbles, kites and streamers, blissed-out smiles and hash smoke. Everywhere I looked I could see the peace symbol. Finally Leary took the stage and gave the most

passionate speech Id ever heard. He ended it with an exhortation that brought a cheer: Turn on, tune in, and drop out.

But as the shadows grew longer, and the sun dipped to the horizon, my anxiety grew.

Ben and Polly came up to us while Jefferson Airplane played in the background. By that time the Human Be-In was in full swing; there were people as far as the eye could see, thirty thousand, perhaps more, jammed tight, some standing, many lounging on the grass, heads bobbing. The atmosphere of comradeship of love was so strong you could almost touch it. Complete strangers would meet, then hug, recognising they were brothers or sisters.

It made me sick to think what would happen if the Blue Moonbeams were handed out.

Once the killing started, when the panic began, thirty thousand tripping, doped-up freaks would turn the place into a frenzied nightmare. How many would die in the crush alone? Suddenly the thud of the bass and the drums felt like the beat of my heart, growing faster, more intense. Time was running out.

Theres no sign of Mathilda anywhere, Ben said. The word among the Diggers is that shell turn up before the end … make a grand entrance to do her big spell.

That may very well be too late, the Doctor said.

Before we could decide our next step, several things happened in quick succession.

First, there was a commotion in the crowd nearby. My heart began to pound. Its started, I said.

But it hadnt, not quite. A psychedelic light show appeared to be moving through the massed ranks, raising a wave of astonished cries and admiring whoops as if it were part of the event. The Doctor stood firm, his face cold. Polly gripped Bens arm in apprehension.

From among the cheering crowd staggered a young man, his face bearing the same blank expression as the one who had presented the robot head to the Doctor. But the light that was flashing everywhere was pouring out of him, seeping in reds and greens, yellows and blues, from every opening in his body, his nose, his eyes, his ears, as if he were bleeding colours.

There was something transcendental about it, but horrific too; it looked like he was dying. He raised his arms wide, like Christ on the cross, and then and even now I dont know if this was just an illusion caused by the shimmering light he floated an inch or two off the ground, his head falling back beatifically, his mouth lolling, the light becoming a fountain of delight soaring into the bright sky.

Within seconds we felt violent tremors run through the earth beneath our feet, so much so that it was hard to stand, yet no one else in the vicinity appeared to be affected. The ground itself was bubbling as if it were liquid beneath the floating mans feet, boiling, rushing upward and out. And then he was sinking into the space that lay beneath; down, down, except he wasnt. Somehow he also remained floating. It was a bizarre sight that beat any trip Id ever been on.

Just as quickly, it was over. Those far-out lights winked out like someone had thrown a switch. The guy hit the ground gently or maybe hed never left it and looked around in a daze before running off into the crowd with cheers at his heels. We didnt try to follow him.

There was a long period of silence while we attempted to make sense of what happened, and then the Doctor said simply and quietly, Remarkable.

We had no time to react. Ben suddenly stabbed out a pointing finger. Away in the crowd, Mathilda walked haughtily and, I thought, with contempt for those around her, dispensing smiles and cold, withering stares with equal disinterest. Her masked crew surrounded her so that she seemed the queen of all she surveyed.

One of them was handing out something to the people he passed from a large plastic bag. I felt cold and sick: here it was.

Lets go, Ben said. He started to push his way through the packed bodies.

But then something caught my eye and the rest of the world fell away. It was nothing, the merest glimmer; the shape of a head, or the curve of a neck, there then gone in a split-second. Nothing at all; but everything. A glacial chill spread through me, followed by the most intense heat.

Ben or Polly was saying something to me, but I didnt hear, no longer knew they were there. I was pushing away from them, drifting into the sea of dancing, tripping figures. Bodies pressed against me, hands touched my hair, my arms; a crazy whirl floating on the edge of my

consciousness. What had I seen that set me so on edge?

The sheer, heaving mass of the Human Be-In was in my every sense. Was the hallucinogenic intensity of it turning my mind? Moving faster, shoving people aside, running, the Doctor, the Blue Moonbeams, the Colour-Beast all forgotten.

I remember the Grateful Dead playing Morning Dew, a surge of emotion like a tidal wave. I remember the sun and the sky and the feeling of rising up and coming together.

From among the swell of bodies, a mask in African tribal garb with incongruous oriental stylings loomed towards me. It was followed by the hideous hard-edged screech of Mathildas voice as she pushed her way past her henchmen.

Thats her, she snapped, jabbing one black-nailed finger at me. The little bitch who gate-crashed the party. I thought you dealt with her.

One of the masked men muttered to her, but she flapped him away furiously. Mathilda put on a fake smile for the benefit of the crowd. It was all street theatre; however I reacted, there would be no response. Her thugs started to circle, ready to grab me.

I could see they were all on edge, afraid I would do something to ruin their carefully laid plan. Then, as I backed away, I noticed the bag filled with Blue Moonbeams and decided to do something stupid.

Lunging forward, I snatched the bag from loose fingers and then forced my way back into the crowd. Mathilda screamed like Id stabbed her in the belly.

Her monkeys came after me, but I was smaller and wirier. I weaved through the bodies while Mathildas men stumbled and got caught up. I fell straight into the Doctor, almost knocking him over in my panic. He noticed the bag of tabs instantly.

Come on, quickly, we must hide.

He pulled me behind a group who had stripped off their clothes and were dancing naked, painting each others bodies with flowers. We sprawled on the ground, watching the masked men searching futilely. Eventually they gave up and returned to Mathilda.

Her face was a picture of fury and soon after they moved away, clearly leaving the event.

The Doctor gripped my forearm enthusiastically. Well done, Summer! Theyve already given a few out, I said. How long do you think weve got?

Theres not much we can do here

But we have to do something!

And we will, he said calmly. But not here. I now know the source of all this, Summer, and we must finally face up to what lies behind it.

The music floated over Golden Gate Park and out into the world as we scrambled out of the crowd just in time to see Mathilda and her cronies clambering into a long black limo with smoked windows.

Ben and Polly were waiting nearby with Stimson. He was sitting cross-legged on the bonnet of a beat-up, rust-stained car, his cigarette holder sticking out jauntily. He gave a theatrical wave when he saw me.

Ben and Polly found our good friend Jack in the journalists pen, the Doctor said as an aside, and convinced him to give us a ride.

Are you going to explain that last thing we saw, Doctor? Ben said drily as we clambered in.

Oh, you mean you didnt work it out? the Doctor replied, teasingly. Ben sighed with irritation, so the little man quickly continued: The symbolism was even plainer than on previous occasions. In 1906, San Francisco was devastated by an earthquake. Many of the pre-earthquake streets and buildings still exist beneath ground the new city was simply built over the top of them. Somewhere within those hidden streets hides the source of all this.

I dont understand what this has to do with Mathilda, Polly said.

Whatevers going on, we need to sort it out quick, Ben said. You think theres some way to stop those kids turning into monsters, Doctor?

I think, the Doctor began, that we have to explore every avenue.

Stimson snapped his fingers at the wheel. Sounds like a great story here, people.

But youve gotta give me something more to go on. Where are we headed?

Therell be a sign; the Doctor replied. Im sure of it.

While Ben and Polly attempted to fill a disbelieving Stimson in on what had happened, the Doctor turned to me and said gently, You seem quiet, Summer.

Through the window, the colours of the Haight had given way to the brown blur of the straight city. I was wrapped up trying to make sense of what Id seen that had affected me so much; it was so slight it didnt register on my conscious mind, but it was wriggling away frantically at the back of my head.

Im okay. I just feel … tired. This whole thing is getting me down.

He nodded slowly and thoughtfully. I realise you have been through a great deal, Summer, but you are a very resilient woman.

Not so long ago, everything looked so bright

The Doctor took my hand gently and secretly so the others couldnt see. If theres one thing Ive learned in my travels, its that, for all its horrors, the universe tends towards good. In the middle of a moment, its easy to see darkness, and to give in to the blackest despair. But across the scope of centuries, the view reveals a path that always encounters valleys but continues ever higher, that never stops rising.

I was surprised to hear those words of support. Hed always seemed so distracted, so uncaring. Thats what I always wanted to believe. Then keep believing. Dont lose heart, Summer. I desperately wanted to accept what he said, but for some reason I couldnt put into words, I was afraid of what was to come.

We drove around an area suggested by Stimson without much luck until Ben called out, Doctor, I think you were right.

A light show played out over the rooftops not far away. Stimson drove too fast while attempting to re-light his cigarette, then brought us to a sharp stop when he saw where we were headed. The guy wed seen at the Polo Grounds stood in the deserted street, light streaming out of him so that the surrounding buildings were painted in the most amazing displays of shifting colours.

Cool, Stimson said, transfixed. And weird. And a little scary.

As we approached, the light-guy indicated a dirty, old wooden door in a place that looked like itd been abandoned for years. It was locked,

but the Doctor managed to get it open with some little gadget he pulled out of his pocket. An atmosphere of damp and age drifted out. The glaring lights revealed cracked plaster, sagging ceiling, and a trapdoor in the middle of dirty floorboards.

I think we need to go down, the Doctor said.

The minute we ventured inside, the amazing light-show winked out. The street was empty, no sign of where the guy could have vanished to so quickly.

Spooky, Stimson said, clearly affected by what hed seen.

Beneath the trapdoor, stairs wound down into the dark. Do you think this is Mathildas secret hideout? Ben said anxiously.

Polly looked pale in the fading light. What if some of those things … those Colour-Beasts … are here, Doctor? They could be all over the place and we wouldnt be able to see them. They could kill us before we even knew anything was happening.

It seems from what Summer told us of her experience in the Goblins house that those things can be seen with the right altered perception, the Doctor said.

If youre tripping, I added.

He nodded, removing from his pocket something that resembled a hypodermic but with no needle. I prepared this earlier … not quite sure when or how I intended using it.

Polly eyed it warily. What is it?

A synthesised substance that will mimic the effects of lysergic acid diethylamide without any of the dangerous effects.

Wow, Stimson said. Opening the doors of perception.

In a way, the Doctor mused. It will help us see clearly. But I dont think it wise for us all to take it. We need lucid minds for what lies ahead.

Ill do it, I said. To be honest, there was no bravery in my offer; I simply wanted something to distract me from my thoughts about Denny.

Oh, Summer, I dont know Polly began.

Ive dropped acid before. I know what to expect.

The Doctor waved Polly silent and took my arm. It might be a little different from what youre used to. Certainly it wont be so potent.

Im not looking for kicks. Now Id made my decision I felt steel in me.

Right you are, then. The Doctor put the hypodermic-thing against my forearm and I felt a little pressure but no pain. He patted the back of my hand like some friendly old uncle, then turned to the others. Lets go, shall we?

The Doctor and Ben tried to persuade Stimson to stay behind, but he wasnt having any of it. As we made our way down the stairs, the hit started to work. The Doctor was right: it was different from the average trip, mellower, and I felt more in control, but I could feel the waves building in the same way. The dark felt like velvet wrapped around me; as we descended I had the impression I was floating down a long hole. My hearing became more acute, or I thought it did; there was a sound like the buzz of high-tension cables in the walls, and somewhere a noise like the beat of a giant heart. Lub-dub, lub-dub.

At the bottom was a brick alley that smelled of old dust. We were in a twilight zone of grey light on the edge of illumination from an electric bulb not too far away. To one side there was a red door that looked brand new. We approached it cautiously and listened. There were faint echoes of machinery, but nothing more.

The Doctor reached out for the door handle, but then hesitated. What is it, Doctor?

asked Ben, anxiously.

Well … I do think we may be going into this Just a little … mobhanded, the Doctor replied. Five sets of tramping feet isnt really ideal, if we want to proceed in caution.

Under duress, Ben, Polly and Stimson agreed to hang back. The Doctor took the handle firmly and swung open the door. We stepped over the threshold.

My tripping mind first told me Id woken up from a bad dream. The light was unbearably bright, but it was only after the semi-gloom of the alley and because the walls and ceilings were a pristine white. We were in a clean, modern corridor with strip lights overhead. Numbered doors lay on either side and at the end was a T-junction.

Curioser and curioser, the Doctor said.

We spent what seemed like hours wandering around that place, though I guess that was my warped time perception. My senses were flying; I felt like a ghost, like I could walk through walls. I dreamt I knew everything there was to know about life, and it was good. We were in some kind of laboratory. Occasionally or perhaps only once

wed come upon long windows giving a view into rooms filled with shimmering glass test-tubes bubbling with golden light and machines that hummed like cats in the night.

At one point voices came up like cascading waves. The Doctor grabbed my arm and pulled me round a corner where we couldnt be seen. I had to stifle a giggle; I wanted to step out and show myself.

Four men passed by at the end of the next corridor and my laughter was sucked away from me. They had faces like cemeteries, sloping in dark suits, white shirts, dark ties; creeps. I recognised the guy who almost lost his mask at Mathildas party. The Doctor watched them go, rigid and dark.

I heard it long before I saw it. No, thats not quite right: I felt it, in my head.

Whispering, quiet and gentle like the wings of a butterfly. Then came the colours on the walls, ceiling and floor, migrating slowly as if they had a life of their own.

Miniature mandalas that swirled with so many complex shades it made my head spin. The Doctor couldnt see them.

As we progressed, the colours took on form, became like water lapping all around, like columns of fire, like skin rippling in the sun.

And then we came to a door, a white door, and it felt like a way through to another universe. The Doctor put a hand on my shoulder to steady me and we entered.

In the centre of a large vault was the Colour-Beast. The impression of it on my mind was like hitting a brick wall; I felt terror and wonder in equal measure and it was only the Doctors steadying hand that kept me from running out of there, screaming.

It was twice the size of a man, with enormous batwings folded behind it; the face was a mass of ridges and horns, like some horrible demon

from a medieval painting. And across its surface, those astonishing colours swirled and mutated hypnotically. Yet more than its appearance, it was the feel of it that disturbed me the most, as if I was recoiling from the sheer alien-ness of it on some level beyond the five senses.

Yet despite its terrifying appearance, it was shackled to the floor by huge chains.

This confused me for a moment until something squirmed in my mind, like a rat at the back of my skull, moving around, probing. I heard a scream when I realised it was that thing doing something to me, and was shocked to realise it was my voice.

Stay calm, Summer, the Doctor said firmly but gently. Remain focused. I cant see anything you are my eyes. I tried to describe what I saw, failed miserably, thought I was going to be sick. Your brain is having trouble comprehending the signals its being sent.

The nausea will pass.

How can I see it? I murmured.

You may have noticed the strobing effect as hallucinogens take hold. Its caused by the alpha rhythm of the brain modulating the visual field, producing a flicker effect. And again when the drug wears off. He paused to steady me; the tension in the room was rising dramatically. I think this being we see before us modulates its natural colour at hyper-speed, effectively making it one colour and all colours, certainly too much for our normal faculties to deal with.

But the acid adjusts us

Just enough to comprehend it, exactly.

Strange … I dont feel its a threat. Despite the soaring anxiety levels, at its heart I sensed something almost gentle.

No. Despite what Ben and Polly thought, I always believed the communication it established was an honest attempt to reach out.

Suddenly the squirming in my head returned with renewed force. I pitched forward, clutching my temple. I heard the Doctor cry out my name, and then… I was standing in the Oval Office. Honest to God, I swear I was there. The seal on the carpet, the desk, the windows open to the sun-drenched garden beyond, dust motes drifting in a shaft of

light. It was so peaceful I wanted to cry.

Hello. JFK stood before me smiling, though the space had been empty a split-second before. I think I cried out, maybe jumped back a step, but, really, I can hardly recall a thing about my reactions. The experience was so rich and deep I was lost inside it. And JFK spoke to me in that familiar Boston twang as if bad things had never happened, would never happen, though I remember nothing of the actual words.

Instead my head swarmed with stars, galaxies, the entire universe from the beginning of time to the very end. I was aware of a race of tremendous beings so powerful we couldnt even begin to comprehend their true nature, but good, wildly, excellently good in the way that I believe the universe is good. They existed beyond us, moving back and forward through time, through space, always watching, never interfering.

They knew our every thought, our hopes and dreams and petty little hatreds. And they understood…

As lights flickered through the void between stars, I accepted how they could alter perception at the most fundamental level, how their essence could infect the mind…

the building blocks of life… to create hybrids of themselves. I saw the extremes of wonder, the glitter and glow of existence.

And then the fall… Dragged down to our time, our place. Something out there, specific to here and now, that weakened them incredibly. A sucking blackness, as cold as the grave, thrusting them out of their glorious existence into the cold, hard world, dampening their power enough to be captured and contained by… by whom?

Mathilda? Did the witch cast some spell? Did…

And then it told me the meaning of life, and though I knew Id never remember it when I came out of that state, it filled me with light; I could feel my tears hot on my face.

An explosion. I thought: Its happened again. Someones killed him again. JFK, receding through space, no Jackie there to clutch for the rest of him. Desolation…

the awful pain of separation…

And my eyes cleared…

The creeps were in the room, holding the Doctor back, six of them, those cemetery-faces sucking me in. One of them had slapped me round the face to jolt me out of the connection. The leader, a creep with a streak of grey in his hair, said, Get them out of here.

We were hauled into an adjoining room with one of those long windows so I could still see the Colour-Beast. Now I could look past its appearance I felt so sad at what had happened to it. It was something so wonderful, something that deserved to fly free, and it was imprisoned.

The creeps couldnt see it, but it was obvious they didnt care about it at all. They were dangerous, the kind of people you saw all over the place but didnt pay any attention because they looked so dull, but a part of you knew that if they needed to, theyd mess up your life without blinking those dead eyes.

Now, the Doctor began. One of the creeps thrust a gun in his direction furiously.

The Doctor raised his hands and backed away quickly. Lets not be hasty, he said.

You were communicating with it, the one with the grey streak looked at me coldly.

How can you keep it penned up here? I said. Do you have any idea what it is?

What did it say? His eyes didnt waver.

It told me what you were doing. I sounded confident, but I still didnt really understand. I was just trying to pick the reality from the impressions it had given me in the Oval Office.

What is that, exactly? Grey Streak said.

The Blue Moonbeam tablets contain some element of this creature, removed in this laboratory, the Doctor said. Once consumed, it infects the host and turns him or her into a hybrid of this creature, but without any control an invisible killing machine. But no human being could cope with that, and within time they are consumed by the forces unleashed within them. He glanced at me. At least, thats what Id guess. You were speaking aloud as it communicated.

I moved to the corner and sunk to the floor, hugging my knees,

overcome with a wave of paranoia.

The question is, what could possibly be the point of all this? the Doctor continued.

Wheres Mathilda? I said suddenly, grinding my teeth.

The creeps faces were as much masks as the ones theyd taken off, but I saw something the faintest shadow on Grey Streaks expression.

The Doctor saw it too. Gone.

Gone?

Disappeared. A loose end.

A chill ran through me. They killed her!

Ah, but she was a cog, the Doctor said. Unimportant. He seemed to have grasped what was happening; it was still beyond me.

Grey Streak checked his watch. I guess hed heard enough to conclude that we werent a threat. Get rid of them, he said. There was no emotion there; it was like he was ordering a cup of coffee. They all traipsed out after him, apart from the one who obviously handled that kind of business; I couldnt tell him apart from the others.

He took out a gun and fitted it with a silencer. In my state, I had the sudden feeling I was in Goldfinger and the Doctor was James Bond. Hed do something … I dont know, a karate chop, and save the day. It didnt happen that way.

What did happen was just as dramatic. There was a sound outside the door and the creep went to investigate. As he grabbed the handle, the door burst inwards. The creep went flying, the gun skidded to the far wall. Ben piled in and stood over the creep with one fist raised, but the creep had hit his head and was already out. Ben glanced at the Doctor. You wouldnt believe the trouble we had finding you. What are you doing, hiding away in here?

You took your time, didnt you? The Doctor sniffed. I was about to re-assess my opinion of your ability to act on your own initiative.

Polly came in and rushed over to me with Stimson close behind; he looked unusually anxious. What is going on here? he said.

Goldfinger, I muttered, drifting again.

We have to free the Colour-Beast, the Doctor said. It may have the power to prevent the tragedy that is unfolding. It was calling to me, plucking memories from my mind to entice me, making them real somehow, or the perception that they were real, so it must feel that I have the ability to release it.

What if you cant get it free? I said. Those creeps could be back any minute

Go back with Mr Stimson, the Doctor said to me. Do whatever you can to end the event early … guide people out of there. He paused, searching for the right words.

And if the transformations have begun, you can see them, Summer. You may be able to save someone.

His tone made me cold; I could tell he feared the worst.

That was the last I saw of the Doctor, Ben and Polly. I got out of there with Stimson and we beat it back to the Polo Grounds as fast as his heap of junk would go. He didnt talk to me all the way, too freaked out by everything.

The Human Be-In was just coming to an end when we made our way into the crowds, but most people were still hanging around, tripping, loving each other, feeling part of something big.

What do we do now, chicklet? Stimson said apprehensively.

Just leave it to me. I scanned the crowd; everybody was happy, beaming, talking, but in my trippy state I could feel it was about to happen. Its going down, I said. Soon. Go to your boss … see if he can get these people out of here quickly.

Stimson nodded and ran off. I pushed my way through the bodies frantically.

And then it happened again: something half-seen that sent shivers down my spine. I backed up, searched vainly; I couldnt tell what it was. A second later it was there again, nothing more than an impression, perhaps a silhouette, or the shape of a craning neck; but it was enough. I headed towards it as fast as I could, scarcely believing the thoughts bursting like stars in my head.

A hand, a crook of an arm; a jigsaw-person slowly coming together.

The rest of the world slipped away. I emerged from a wall of humanity into a sphere of pure silence.

Denny?

He couldnt have heard my paper-thin whisper beneath the crowd-noise, but still he turned; and it was him. The late-afternoon sun was at his back and his eyes were bluer than Id ever seen them. His hair was longer, and he had a scruffy goatee, his clothes home-dyed and scrawled with peace symbols. I ploughed into him hard, burying my head in his chest, trying to work out if it was another trip, if it was the Oval Office in new form, feeling as if every bit of me was coming apart.

I thought you were dead, I whispered.

He prised me off, gripping my shoulders so he could look into my eyes. Summer? What are you doing here?

Looking for you. Now I couldnt hold back the tears. Whereve you been, Denny?

What happened … what … they said you were dead. For a second I thought my mind might actually wink out like a light bulb with too much power running through it.

This isnt the time. He pushed me to one side, uncomfortable, distracted. I staggered back a step and the surroundings fell into relief.

Some of the masked creeps were nearby, looking out across the crowd; waiting for the Blue Moonbeams to take effect. I dont know if it was a different group from the one that had been at the lab, but they hadnt seen me. I went to grab Dennys arm to drag him away. Until I realised he was with them.

For a few seconds my instinct and my conscious mind fought over what I wanted to believe and what was really happening.

Then a commotion erupted in the crowd nearby. A scream. People scrambling to get away, like ripples escaping a deep sea earthquake, slowly turning into a tidal wave.

Denny looked towards it impassively. Its started.

I had only a second to feel queasy from what I saw in his face before another pocket of panic erupted, and then another, and then in my section of the crowd there was chaos and I was swept away from Denny by the torrent.

Somehow I fought my way past the flow, thankful it was all confined to one small area; if the whole bag of Blue Moonbeams had been handed out it would have been disaster. But all I could think of was what happened to the Goblin at the last, and how bad it would be with even a few.

It would have been sensible to get the hell out of there, but I wasnt thinking, or maybe I was thinking too much. I got through to the horrible centre of the disturbance, where flesh and muscle had disappeared, and only staring bones remained, flailing, bad-tripping, terrified. I dont know what I expected to do … drag out any poor freak too petrified to move … but it was just me and them.

This time I saw the transformation in all its sickening glory. As the bones flickered and grew translucent, there was an instant where everything froze and then the body started to put itself back together again: reforming muscle, shaping horns and wings, making terror out of nothing, but painting it with all the colours of the rainbow.

I should have run, but by then it was too late and, perhaps, I thought, it didnt really matter anyway. I was transfixed by the wild, crazy weirdness of it all. And then they moved for me, faster than I could have dreamed. I closed my eyes and waited.

There were colours behind my lids, in my head, colours everywhere. And I waited, but nothing happened.

And when I looked again, the strangest thing was happening, even crazier than everything before. The Colour-Beasts were unfolding, turning back into the poor freaks they had been before, wings and horns stripping back, colours flying away into space.

I felt a whisper in my head, saw dust motes in a sunbeam, and turned to see JFK

watching me from the stage. I couldnt say he really smiled, but there was something … a connection. The Doctor, Ben and Polly had done whatever they needed to do, and that wonderful thing was free to fly and take all the madness with it.

Except there wasnt a happy ending, not for me, or for the world. Not

long after, I found Denny in the shadows of the stands. Id like to think that he waited for me, that he at least owed me that, but Im sure he was just skulking until he had his moment to get away. The rest of the creeps were gone, faded into the background like their kind always did. Those who saw what happened would talk excitedly about it for a day or two, but in the Capital City of Trips, it wasnt anything out of the ordinary.

They work for the Government, dont they? I looked at him hard, by that stage too strung out at the end of the trip to feel anything other than hurt.

No. Denny was adamant. Then: Not directly. They work for the people who really run the country. The Combine, I said.

Denny snorted contemptuously. Stupid hippie name for it!

What were they … you … I said that with venom and I was happy to see he flinched, trying to do?

Denny said nothing, but I already knew. It was the war, the one that had started in Dallas, and they were gradually eliminating the enemy, one-by-one. That day, a new threat was going to be derailed. They wanted to keep reality their way not our way.

My way.

That thing they captured is like the bomb! Denny laughed. With that behind them, they can do anything.

What did they do to you, Denny?

He tried to laugh off my comment, but all I heard was a terrible guilt, and that made his words even harsher. This is the real world, Summer. Youve got to wake up to it.

All that peace and love shit

You believed in that!

He shrugged. Maybe, for a while, yeah. But then you open your eyes.

You sold out! They gave you … what? A bundle of cash and promises?

So what? At least I know which way the wind blows. Im not living in a dream like you, Summer. Theyre gonna win, and you might as well be on the winning side. They offered me a job, thats all

To get in tight with what was going on here in the Haight, I said, watching it all come together. They must have approached him the moment he arrived. I couldnt have stayed in his memory for more than a day. To spread the poisoned tabs.

Denny looked out into the dark where a few strands of mist were forming.

I found your shirt at the Goblins, covered in blood.

He realised what I was doing there, cut me with that shiv before I got out.

Trying to screw up his business.

We needed to get rid of him so there was a shortage of good stuff. More demand for the Blue Moonbeams.

Youve really mastered your capitalism lessons, havent you? I felt like my heart was breaking. How could I have been so completely wrong about him? What does that say about me? Two hearts. Together, forever. Was I as naive and stupid as Denny believed?

Or maybe you just cant know anybody, not really, not in the secret depths of them.

What are you going to do now, kill me so I dont tell?

No. He shrugged, looked away; it wasnt that much of a denial. Nobodyll believe you anyway. Theyre good at making the papers and the TV go deaf.

And you think theyll look after you? Youre a nobody, Denny, another cog just like Mathilda. And when they finish with you

He shook his head firmly. No. Because I play the game.

I dont know how long I thought about those words in the years that followed; somehow it summed up the whole sick mess the world was in. How could I fight something like that? If Denny could be corrupted, someone who I thought had the purest of beliefs, then anybody could be. The creeps didnt have to kill that movement in the Haight that they obviously found so threatening. Wed do the job ourselves.

With the mist folding around us, he turned to me, the lamps reflected

in the shadows of his eyes. You want to get out of here, Summer. Theyll be back soon, to clear up any mess. The stress he gave to that word told me I was included in the description.

But now that you know about them, they wont let you fade away. Im sorry it turned out like this. Really. I liked you. I laughed. His voice grew hard with threat: Keep running, Summer, and dont look back.

And thats just what I did.

There was another assassination that day, as effective as the one that murdered President Kennedy. Denny killed the last part of me that had hope for something better. With the mist drifting through the city, I left San Francisco for the last time. Before dawn, I was heading south towards LA, and from there I moved slowly eastwards, never staying in one place too long, always watching over my shoulder. My life slipped into the twilight.

The fear was always there; Id seen what those people were capable of. Every time I caught sight of smart suits and dead-eyed men, Id step back into the shadows; but that was the worst thing … they were normal, more normal than normal, and people like that were everywhere. They never drew attention to themselves, only acted when it was necessary. They could be anyone, in any place.

And if I ever thought it was all in my mind, thered be incidents like the time in Houma when I returned from my shift at the diner to find my squalid apartment turned over and the landlord talking about men in suits whod be back. Or the night in some Kansas backwater I cant even remember the name of, when a black car with black windows followed me for ten miles before trying to force me off the road. I only escaped because I jumped out and hid in a cornfield.

Im not stupid enough to think they were searching for me all the time, but sometimes a file would be shuffled, or Id just drift into someones personal radar as a loose end, somebody who might surface at some time with a story to tell.

These are the true enemies of life on our planet. Not alien creatures or supernatural threats, not even religious fanatics with bombs strapped to their chests; bland men in bland suits who will do anything to stay in power.

So I watched from the sidelines as the Summer of Love burst in a blaze of publicity and hope, knowing with a terrible fatalism that the end was not far away. The players in the burgeoning hippie movement

spoke of changing society, challenging the war in Vietnam, but I knew they were all deluding themselves into believing they had any chance at all; any power.

When I was in the Oval Office I had a distinct impression of great sadness, that the Colour-Beast wasnt the only one imprisoned. That there were more. Did they refine their dark arts, become more subtle in the use of such a great power? Was it there, in the desert, when Charlie was planning his night-time raids on LA? Helter Skelter.

Death to Pigs. Did it help corrupt Chapman when John was shot? John, the last advocate of the hippie sixties, of peace and love, who was about to launch a pro-cannabis campaign and speak out against the businessmen and politicians and generals crushing America down.

Or am I just being another stupid, burnt-out, paranoid hippie?

What I do know is you can track the slow death of innocence and hope across the 1960s and into the 1970s, as a parade of lone gunmen and sly corruptors attacked from without and within, a thousand unconnected events, coincidences and haphazard mistakes leading to the eradication of the last chance we had for a better world.

The bland men in their bland suits won, and they would have won without their Colour-Beasts and whatever other super-secret weapons they used, because theyre just harder than us, theyll go that one step further to achieve their ends. We never stood a chance.

Ive seen Denny several times, though never face-to-face, over the thirty-plus years since we last met in Golden Gate Park on that misty night when my world finally collapsed. He was always a grainy image in the background of front page newspaper photos at global hotspots though I could always tell it was him or merging into the crowds on TV news reports of G2 summits and WTO meetings. Nam in the early days, Cambodia, El Salvador, Colombia, Grenada, Afghanistan twice, Serbia, Iraq; some I saw the pictorial evidence, others I simply knew thats where he was. Because Denny was good at playing the game.

Headlights just played across the dark fields and trees at the end of the lane. This is it, the end. Hes here.

The other day I saw a news report of a team of weapons experts coming back from a long stay of negotiations with various regimes in the Middle East. Before that theyd been in the former Yugoslavia. And before that … who knows? Who knows anything, really? And at the back of the group trooping off the plane was Denny, back on

American soil at last. I could see this wasnt the Denny whod saved me on that first night we met. Hed worked hard to get his cold, dead, killers eyes; and hed got himself a nice, bland, merge-into-the-background suit.

The next day my phone started acting strange, taps and clicks and occasionally Id hear my own voice played back to me. Mail began arriving late and clearly opened; they didnt even bother to hide their dirty fingerprints. And this morning I found a letter in my mailbox that contained a single sheet of paper; on it was a drawing of two hearts.

The implication was clear: finally, it was my time. Id disappear like all the other thousands all over the globe. Even though Im a weak, cowardly thing, not a threat at all, those kind cant abide loose ends.

The lights are moving slowly up the lane. He doesnt need to move fast. Theres nowhere for me to run, and besides, Im tired of it. Sometimes I dream of San Francisco and what might have been. I dream of the person I used to be bright, happy, filled with hope, and with love

and I think of a life wasted.

I dont like this world. Theres no place in it for someone like me. The gun is hard and alien and Im still not quite sure how I should go about it. Do it now, get it over with? Or face-to-face, a last futile gesture? Does it really matter?

The worst thing is that nobody will care.

The sound was like a siren running backwards, or the last, dying wail of some mythical beast. It filled the house, echoing from the very rafters.

I stood on the landing, listening to the crunch of gravel as the car pulled on to the turning area at the front of the house. The gun was against my temple, my finger tight on the trigger, and still I couldnt do it. But when I saw his face, carrying the weight of years and other peoples misery, that would be enough, I thought; I hoped. But that strange, disturbing sound?

You wouldnt believe the trouble I had finding you.

The voice made me start and I almost pulled the trigger by accident. A strange man stood at the end of the landing. He had a friendly face

and he was wearing a floppy hat that would have been fashionable back in the 1970s and a long scarf wrapped several times around his neck. Though Id never seen him before, I had the odd feeling that I knew him.

He noticed the gun. Come now, that wont solve anything.

Im not trying to solve things.

He tutted, motioned for me to put the gun down. Outside, a car door slammed.

Who are you?

We met a long time ago, by your terms. In San Francisco, 1967.

He could have been any one of a hundred forgotten hippies, but I recognised some indefinable quality. Doctor? He smiled. How… ?

Long story. No time for it now.

He motioned for me to follow. I felt like Id stepped into some strange dream, or else I was on another trip; and perhaps I was, one that had started more than thirty years earlier. The gun hung limply at my side as I trailed into the spare bedroom. If Id had the slightest doubt, it disappeared then: that freaky police box stood in one corner.

Ben and Polly?

Long gone, Im afraid.

A rattling at the door downstairs.

Why are you here? I asked, dazed.

For you, Summer. After the Colour-Beast was freed, I came looking, but you werent to be found anywhere. Frankly, I feared the worst. It took a remarkable effort to locate you. He smiled again. But it was worth it.

You searched for me? But you never seemed like you were interested in my problems at all. You were always telling me to give up … when you could be bothered to talk to me at all.

He gave a silent laugh; despite the darkness of the moment and my mood, I felt oddly comforted by his presence. We have to find our own path, he said. If I did all the hard work for you, youd never have

appreciated it.

The faint sound of the lock clicking. I glanced back at the landing, then at gun.

His eyes grew concerned, and the smile faded. I know what youre going through, Summer.

How could you possibly?

I know many things, Summer. A great many things.

A blast of cold air as the front door opened silently.

All I wanted was a better world. My voice broke. But theres nothing anyone can do. Theyll win every time!

He shook his head. All those years ago, I told you how it works. From your perspective, things look dark. But over the span of centuries, of millennia, there is a different a better view.

I shook my head in disbelief, tears filling my eyes so I could barely see him. Why did you come here, Doctor?

Footsteps crossing the hall, checking the downstairs rooms. It felt like a shadow had fallen across me.

Why? l blinked away the tears and was surprised by the compassion in his face.

Suddenly I felt like a child again, looking up at my father. The universe needs people like you more than you would ever know, Summer. You must never give in to despair. You and people like you

 are important. Special. You can make a difference. Youve seen them

You can, Summer. He pulled a book from inside his jacket: The Secret Government

an investigation of the corruption at the heart of America. By Jack Stimson.

Footsteps on the stairs now, the darkness drawing closer.

When was this published? I asked in amazement.

Next year. He smiled. Theres always hope, Summer. You just have to

keep your head up during the dark times.

Why are you helping me, Doctor? Why me?

He shook his head, wide-eyed with exasperation. Why? Because I like you, thats why! He nodded to the gun. You wont be needing that.

Footsteps on the landing, my desperate past catching up with me. I threw the gun on to a chair.

Now, shall we go on a little journey? He stood aside and motioned to that weird little police box. Through the open door, the most brilliant golden light glowed. I looked into his face, briefly, and saw such honesty and hope and innocence there that I was appalled by how much Id previously misjudged him. Thank you, I said, blinking away the tears.

Oh, dont mention it.

We stepped into the light together.

My first impressions were right about the Doctor, if only Id stuck by them. Whatever he claims to be, I know the truth. Its there for anyone to see: he comes from somewhere else in the time of your greatest need, offering you a hand to help you when everyone else is lost in the dark. Hes true and decent, a force for good in a bleak universe. He saved me from despair, and he led me towards a better world. What does that define? We know. We all know.

It might be a metaphor; as a poet I understand those things. It might…

My first impressions I remember them like they were only yesterday, like time had no meaning at all…

About the Author

Critics have praised Mark Chadbourn for the astonishing detail and realism he brings to his novels. The reason: the kind of research most people would go out of their way to avoid. For example, for his first novel Underground, set in an isolated mining community, he worked hundreds of feet beneath the earth, crawling along tunnels barely two feet high, experiencing the same kind of brutal lifestyle as his coal miner characters. Other novels include Nocturne and Scissorman, and a nonfiction book Testimony, for which Mark experienced the terrors of a real haunted house …

His current fantasy trilogy, The Age of Misrule (Worlds End, Darkest Hour and Always Forever) has received acclaim for both its detail and its academic research. An expert on British folklore, Mark studied volumes of research on prehistoric Britain, including the sites of Stonehenge, Avebury and Tintagel, as well as Celtic culture and neolithic life. He spent six months on the road touring Britain, mapping out a detailed path for his characters to follow, including not only famous historical sites, but also industrial estates, pubs, cafes, shopping centres and more. Its possible to use these three volumes as a travel guide to the UK.

His penchant for gritty research began when he was a journalist, working for British national newspapers, magazines and TV. On NATO manoeuvres inside the Arctic Circle, Mark slept in tents with the British soldiers in temperatures of -20°C, fired bazookas and drove tanks across the snowy wastes. He was also set on fire by an exploding lamp and saved by a nearby snow drift. Other work has seen Mark being locked in a shop and threatened by gangsters, being at the centre of a riot, being shot at in the California desert, accompanying a Formula 1 racer at 250 mph around Donington racetrack, and going undercover investigating criminal activity across Europe and America.

Worlds End and Nocturne were both nominated for the prestigious August Derleth Award for Best Novel, and Mark has been shortlisted for the British Fantasy Societys Best New Talent award. His career took off when he won Fear magazines Best New Author award for his first published short story, Six Dead Boys In A Very Dark World. His latest book is another novella, The Fairy Fellers Master Stroke, about the coming of age of a young man through the eponymous painting by Richard Dadd.

Mark has interviewed scores of celebrities from Paul McCartney, Bob Geldof and Elton John to Tim Burton, Catherine Zeta Jones and George Michael and has also worked in the media as a film and TV reviewer. Outside of journalism, hes cleaned toilets, driven vans, worked as a fitters mate at a power station, and put Marmite jars on a conveyor belt.

During the early nineties, Marks long-standing love of music saw him turn to managing bands including one top five act and running the independent record company, Faith.

Mark hails from the Midlands and a long line of miners. He now lives in the heart of a forest where he indulges his passions for environmental campaigning and magic.